



UNVEILING TRUTH: FLUSSER'S ILLUSORY OBJECTIVITY OF TECHNICAL IMAGES

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ABSTRACT: Flusser's thoughts on truth and objectivity in technical images are complex and increasingly pertinent in current visual cultures. His perspective is rooted in his philosophical examination of the role of photography and other technical images in modern society, regarding the new forms of information, standardized and reproduced meaning processes, interpretation and objectivity of the image-making and image-decoding processes. According to Flusser, while technical images have objective surfaces and are created through standardized processes, their ultimate meaning and truth are subject to interpretation and influenced by human decisions and cultural contexts. This article follows a theoretical and conceptual approach in the framework of Flusser's philosophy of photography and its purposes are: a) to understand contemporary media and visual culture in shaping our conception of the world; b) to argue the ethical implications of technical images; and c) to demonstrate that Flusser's work on the truth and objectivity of technical images serves various purposes and fields, and provides a framework for exploring the profound impact of technology on our perception of reality and the representation of truth.

KEYWORDS: Flusser, Objectivity, Photography, Technical images, Truth.

1. Introduction

"The 'objectivity' of technical images is an illusion"
Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*.

Flusser's thoughts on truth and objectivity in technical images, particularly in the context of his book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, are complex and increasingly pertinent in current visual cultures. Flusser's perspective is rooted in his philosophical examination of the role of photography and other technical images in modern society, namely regarding on truth and objectivity. Flusser argues that technical images, including photographs, are fundamentally different from traditional, hand-drawn images because they are generated by machines or technical apparatuses. He considers technical images as a form of information that is produced based on pre-established codes and algorithms.

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According to Flusser, technical images have an objective surface, meaning that they are created by processes that can be standardized and reproduced. These processes involve the use of cameras, lenses, chemicals (in the case of traditional photography), and now digital algorithms. As such, the surface of a technical image can be considered objective in the sense that it is created according to a set of rules and parameters. However, Flusser also acknowledges that the objectivity of technical images is limited because they rely on human decisions and interpretations at various stages. For example, the photographer chooses the subject, the framing, the moment of capture, and potentially manipulates the image during development or post-processing. These choices introduce subjectivity into the image-making process. For Flusser, technical images are encoded messages, and the true meaning of an image is not evident on its surface but rather depends on the interpretation of the viewer. The meaning of an image is a result of decoding the information it contains, and this decoding is influenced by the viewer's cultural, historical, and personal context. Flusser states that there is a dialectical relationship between technical images and the people who create and interpret them. Technical images are a product of human intention and technical apparatus, and they, in turn, influence human perception and understanding. This dialectic involves a continuous interplay between objectivity and subjectivity. According to Flusser's views on truth and objectivity in technical images, while technical images have objective surfaces and are created through standardized processes, their ultimate meaning and truth are subject to interpretation and influenced by human decisions and cultural contexts. Therefore, Flusser emphasizes the idea that images are encoded messages that require decoding by the viewer, and this decoding process involves a dynamic interplay between objectivity and subjectivity.

The objectivity of the photograph is deceptive. This idea serves as the motto for this article and is therefore highlighted as an epigraph above. Effectively, in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Flusser (2012, p. 15) points out that “the ‘objectivity’ of technical images is an illusion”. This sentence encapsulates his philosophical perspective on the nature of technical images, such as photographs, and challenges the commonly held notion that these images provide a purely objective representation of reality. Flusser uses the term “technical images” to refer to images that are created through technical or mechanical processes as opposed to traditional hand-drawn or painted images. These technical images are often assumed to be objective because they are produced by machines or apparatuses according to established rules and parameters. Flusser asserts that the idea of objectivity in technical images is deceptive or illusory. While technical images may appear to be objective on the surface due to their

mechanical creation, this apparent objectivity is not as straightforward as it seems. Despite the use of technical apparatuses in image creation, there are subjective choices and interpretations involved in every step of the process. For example, the photographer selects the subject, frames the shot, chooses the timing, and may engage in post-processing. These choices introduce subjectivity into the image-making process.

Additionally, Flusser emphasizes that the meaning and interpretation of a technical image are not inherent in the image itself but depend on the viewer's decoding of the image. Viewers bring their own cultural, historical, and personal context to their interpretation, which can significantly affect how they perceive and understand the image. Flusser views technical images as encoded messages rather than objective representations. These encoded messages contain information, but the true meaning of the image is not evident on its surface. It must be deciphered by the viewer, and this decoding process is influenced by subjectivity.

Flusser's epigraph challenges the common belief that technical images are purely objective by highlighting the presence of subjectivity in both the creation and interpretation of these images. He argues that the appearance of objectivity in technical images is illusory because it overlooks the role of human choices, cultural context, and the decoding process in shaping the meaning and truth of these images. Instead, he suggests that technical images should be seen as encoded messages that engage viewers in a complex interplay between objectivity and subjectivity.

Considering the images are encoded messages and require decoding by the viewer, this article follows a theoretical and conceptual approach in the framework of Flusser's philosophy of photography. The purposes are: a) to understand contemporary media and visual culture that shapes our conception of the world; b) to argue the ethical implications of technical images related to manipulation, truth, and responsibility; and c) to demonstrate that Flusser's work on the truth and objectivity of technical images serves various ethical and practical purposes, contributes to the fields of media theory, philosophy, ethics, visual culture, and media literacy, and provides a framework for exploring the profound impact of technology on our perception of reality and the representation of truth.

2. The objectivity of the image

An important and pertinent aspect today, when cultures are becoming more and more visual and we live under the aegis of disinformation and manipulation, is the objectivity of the image. The objectivity of an image refers to the extent to which the image accurately and

faithfully represents the subject it portrays, often implying a lack of bias or subjective interpretation. However, achieving complete objectivity in an image is challenging, if not impossible, because images are inherently influenced by various factors, including the photographer's choices, cultural context, and the limitations of the medium itself.

Ethical implications related to the objectivity of images are multifaceted and can vary depending on the context and purpose of the image. In fields like photojournalism, the ethical imperative is often to present images that faithfully represent events or situations as they occurred. Manipulating images through techniques like photography editing or staging can be considered unethical because it distorts the truth and misleads the audience. Photojournalists are typically held to high standards of objectivity and honesty in their work. Sometimes, images are altered or manipulated for ethical reasons, such as to protect the identity of vulnerable subjects or to enhance the visual impact of a message in advocacy campaigns. In such cases, transparency about the manipulation and the intent behind it is crucial to maintain ethical integrity. Ethical concerns can arise when images are taken out of context or used to reinforce stereotypes or biases. The way images are framed, captioned, and presented can influence how they are interpreted and can either promote understanding or perpetuate harmful narratives.

In *Towards a Philosophy of photography*, Flusser (2012, p. 8) considers that “images are significant surfaces. Images signify – mainly something ‘out there’ in space and time that they have to make comprehensible to us as abstractions”. For Flusser (2012, p. 8), “this specific ability to abstract surfaces out of space and time and to project them back into space and time is what is known as ‘imagination’”. Imagination is the precondition for the production and decoding of images, i.e. the ability to encode phenomena into two dimensional symbols and to read these symbols. Images owe their origin to imagination, the ability to abstract and encode phenomena and to decode encoded messages. Imagination is the ability to make (encode) and decipher (decode) images. The decoding of images can be superficial and immediate, in a moment, resulting in the understanding of superficial meanings of the image, but it can also be deepened and take longer, thus obtaining deeper and more abstract meanings, meanings-synthesis between the intentions of the sender and of the receiver.

An image is a significant surface on which the elements of the image act in a magic fashion towards one another. The significance of images is on the surface and one can take them in at a single and superficial glance. If one wishes to deepen the significance, i.e. to reconstruct the abstracted dimensions, one has to allow one's gaze to wander over the surface feeling the

way as one goes. “This wandering over the surface of the image is called ‘scanning’.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 8).

The significance of images is achieved through a process in which “one’s gaze follows a complex path formed, on the one hand, by the structure of the image and, on the other, by the observer’s intentions” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 8). The significance of the image as revealed in the process of scanning represents a synthesis of two intentions: one manifested in the image and the other belonging to the observer. “It follows that images are not ‘denotative’ (unambiguous) complexes of symbols (like numbers, for example) but ‘connotative’ (ambiguous) complexes of symbols: They provide space for interpretation.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 8).

“While wandering over the surface of the image, one’s gaze takes in one element after another and produces temporal relationships between them.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 8). “The significance of images is magical”, as Flusser points out, because “one’s gaze also produces significant relationships between elements of the image” and “it can return again and again to a specific element of the image and elevate it to the level of a carrier of the image’s significance” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 9). Therefore, it is wrong to look for “frozen events” in images since images replace events by states of things and translate them into scenes. “The magical power of images lies in their superficial nature, and the dialectic inherent in them - the contradiction peculiar to them - must be seen in the light of this magic.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 9). “Images are mediations between the world and human beings. Human beings ‘ex-ist’, i.e. the world is not immediately accessible to them and therefore images are needed to make it comprehensible.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 9). However, images come between the world and human beings. They are supposed to be maps but they turn into screens: instead of representing the world, they obscure it until human beings’ lives finally become a function of the images they create (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 9).

Human beings decode the images, but they can also or instead project encoded images into the world. For Flusser (2012, p. 10), this is the reversal of the function of the image, which can be called “idolatry”. For example, “the technical images currently all around us are in the process of magically restructuring our ‘reality’ and turning it into a ‘global image scenario’” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 10). Human beings forget they create the images to orientate themselves in the world. “Since they are no longer able to decode them, their lives become a function of their own images: Imagination has turned into hallucination.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 10).

If images are mediations between the world and human beings, as Flusser points out, the world is not immediately accessible. Images fulfil the function of representing the world

and require deciphering that conditions the way the human beings understand and live in the world. “All events are nowadays aimed at the television screen, the cinema screen, the photograph, in order to be translated into a state of things.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 20). In this way, every action simultaneously loses its historical character and turns into a magic ritual and an endlessly repeatable movement.

For example, photographic images in journalism perfectly fulfil the informative and referential function, as they are / should be objective and show how the world is as it is, how the facts happened or resulted in the situation that the images show. Unlike the image in painting or film, the photographic image in journalism is non-fiction. It is an objective image with references in the world that correspond to the aspect, forms, and traces in which they are shown in the image.

3. The illusory objectivity of technical images

A technical image (such as a photograph or television image) is a technological or mechanical image created by apparatus. In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* and *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, Flusser (2011, p. 4) criticizes the contemporary technical images and the dominance of technical images in the future society, considering two divergent trends: “one moves toward a centrally programmed, totalitarian society of image receivers and image administrators, the other toward a dialogic, telematic society of image producers and image collectors”.

Technical images are indirect products of texts, which gives them a different historical and ontological position from traditional images. According to Flusser, technical images and traditional images arise from completely different kinds of distancing from concrete experience. Technical images are completely new media, even if they are in many respects reminiscent of traditional images: “they ‘mean’ in a completely different way from traditional images” and “they actually constitute a cultural revolution” (FLUSSER, 2011, p. 7).

According to Flusser, technical images imagine texts that conceive images that imagine the world, which makes them difficult to decipher. They are difficult to decipher because apparently they do not need to be deciphered, as the meaning of technical images is automatically imprinted on their surfaces, as if they were fingerprints where the meaning (the finger) is the cause and the image (the print) is the effect. The represented world seems to be the cause of technical images.

The credibility of technical images comes from their apparently non-symbolic and objective character, which makes their observers look at them as windows (views of the world) instead of images. The observer trusts technical images as much as he trusts his own eyes. The apparently non-symbolic, objective character of technical images leads whoever looks at them to see them not as images but as windows (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 15).

However, the objectivity of technical images is apparent, as Flusser (2011, p. 49) refers, i.e. it is an illusion, since technical images are still symbolic like any image, nor do they have the intervention of those who produce and encode them: the operator and the machine (device). With a historical and ontological level different from that of traditional images (which ritualize certain models and myths), technical images (which ritualize certain programs) do not aim to modify the world, but our concepts in relation to the world. With technical images, another factor places itself between them and their significance, i.e. a camera and a human being operating it (for example, a photographer), but it does not look as if this ‘machine/operator’ complex would break the chain between image and significance (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 15).

Technical images are not windows, but images, i.e. “surfaces that translate everything into states of things; like all images, they have a magical effect; and they entice those receiving them to project this undecoded magic onto the world out there” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 16). “The magical fascination of technical images can be observed all over the place: The way in which they put a magic spell on life, the way in which we experience, know, evaluate and act as a function of these images.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 16).

The magical fascination of technical images (e.g. television or cinema) is different from that of traditional images (e.g. cave paintings). For Flusser, the difference between ancient and modern magic is as follows: Prehistoric magic is a ritualization of models known as “myths”; current magic is a ritualization of models known as “programs”. Myths are models that are communicated orally and whose author (a “god”) is beyond the communication process, while programs are models that are communicated in writing and whose authors (“functionaries”) are within the communication process: “The new magic is ‘post-historic’, it follows on after historical consciousness. The new enchantment is not designed to alter the world out there but our concepts in relation to the world.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 17). The function of technical images is to liberate their receivers by magic from the necessity of thinking conceptually, at the same time replacing historical consciousness with a second-order magical consciousness and replacing the ability to think conceptually with a second-order imagination (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 17).

For Flusser, the function of technical images is to emancipate society from the need to think conceptually. Technical images must replace historical consciousness with magical consciousness, replace conceptual capacity with imaginative capacity, as photographs were invented in the 19th century in order to recharge texts with magic. “[...] the photograph, the first technical image, was invented in the nineteenth century in order to put texts back under a magic spell, even if its inventors may not have been aware of this.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 17). With writing, history in the narrower sense begins as a struggle against idolatry. With photography, ‘post-history’ begins as a struggle against textolatry (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 17).

Flusser (2012, p. 18) states that technical images (as a code that was to be valid for the whole of society) were invented to prevent culture breaking up. Technical images were invented to introduce images back into daily life, to make hermetic texts comprehensible, and to make visible the subliminal magic that was continuing to operate in cheap texts. Technical images were “to form the lowest common denominator for art, science and politics (in the sense of universal values), i.e. to be at one and the same time ‘beautiful’, ‘true’ and ‘good’, and in this way, as a universally valid code, they were to overcome the crisis of culture - of art, science and politics” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 19).

But technical images function in a different way: they replace traditional images with reproductions, displace them and they distort hermetic texts by translating scientific statements and equations into states of things, i.e. images. For this reason, they grind it up into amorphous masses; “mass culture is the result” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 19). The explanation is due to technical images are surfaces that function in the same way as dams.

Photography is a way of seeing, thinking, and feeling. It is a sign and applies to referents and meanings. But more than a sign, it is a thought-on-surface, a visual object, a *medium* of representing the world that gives meaning and structures thought: “every single photo is - as the surface of an image - a magical model for the actions of an observer” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 70).

The work of taking photographs is carried out through choices of different combinations and categories of the camera, which the photographer manipulates according to his taste, convenience, perspective, or interest. However, the photographer is not free to choose, as the camera does not exactly do what the photographer wants it to do. “Photographers select combinations of categories – for example, they may place the camera in such a way that they can shoot their prey with a side-flash from below.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 35). The

photographers' choice is limited to the categories of the camera, and the freedom of the photographer remains a programmed freedom.

The photographer's choice is restricted to the camera categories. It is a programmed freedom. The camera functions according to the photographer's intentions, but this intention itself functions according to the camera program since "with the invention of photography, there emerges a new dominant class, with a new consciousness: that of image programmers" (FLUSSER, 2015, p. 19).

For example, if one sees images of war on television or at the cinema, one knows one has no alternative but to look at it, but if one sees it in a newspaper, one can cut it out and keep it, send it to friends with comments or screw it up in rage (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 60). One thinks one is thereby able to react in an active way to the scene of war. The photograph of the war scene is an image which, as one's gaze wanders over the surface, produces magical (not historical) relationships between the elements of the image and the reader (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 60).

In the photograph, we see magical connections. Flusser states that the photograph illustrates a newspaper article whose structure is linear, and which is made up of concepts with meaningful causes and consequences. However, we read the article through the photograph. Flusser states that it is not the article that explains the photograph, but the photograph that illustrates the article (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 60). This reversal of the text-photo relationship is typically post-industrial and renders any historical action impossible.

For Flusser, if before the texts explained and demystified the images, now the images illustrate the texts by re-mystifying them. Before, images were subservient and expendable; now it is the texts that are subservient and expendable. Newspaper articles serve photographs to be magic again. Previously illiteracy was a difficulty in a culture dominated by texts; now it is part of a culture dominated by images. "We do not react in a historical way to photographic documentation of the war in Lebanon, but with ritual magic." (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 61).

Flusser highlights the programmed state that characterizes the photographic apparatus. According to Flusser, the symbolic surfaces that the photographic device produces are previously inscribed, i.e. they are programmed, pre-inscribed by those who produced it, as the photographs are realizations of some of the potentialities inscribed in the device. However, the photographic apparatus and the photographer already contain, like germs, all the virtualities of the post-industrial world. Above all, it becomes observable in the photographic activity, the devaluation of the object and the valorisation of information as a seat of power. Therefore, the

analysis of the gesture of photographing, this movement of the complex photographic device, can be exercised for the analysis of human existence in a post-industrial, equipped situation.

As a hunting movement in which the device and the photographer merge to form an inseparable functional unit, the gesture of photographing allows the photographer to choose the most convenient potentialities and categories made available and inscribed in the photographic device, since the camera works according to the intention of the photographer. The choice is programmed. Photographers can only photograph what can be photographed, i.e. “everything located within the program” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 35).

“The act of photography is like going on a hunt in which photographer and camera merge into one indivisible function. This is a hunt for new states of things, situations never seen before, for the improbable, for information.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 39).

In the discussion between the objectivity and subjectivity of the photographic process, the device predetermines the categories and technical possibilities of the practice of photographing, but the photographer also has intentions, concepts, ideas, and criteria that he chooses and encodes in the capture. For this reason, Flusser recognizes that photographs are images of concepts, concepts transcoded into scenes. “There is no such thing as naive, nonconceptual photography. A photograph is an image of concepts. In this sense, all photographers’ criteria are contained within the camera’s program.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 35).

In *El beso de Judas: Fotografía y verdad*, Fontcuberta justifies the belief in the myth of objectivity of photography as a capture of truth/reality, stating that photography has long been understood as the way nature represents itself and the fascination that his discovery produced pointed to that illusion of natural automatism. It’s about copying nature with maximum precision and fidelity without depending on the skills of the person doing it. The apparent consequence is the direct obtaining, without palliatives, of the truth (FONTCUBERTA, 2002, p. 26). This is the field of documentary photography, which records reality with a greater degree of objectivity and a lesser degree of subjectivity, that is, it shows what it shows as it is, with realism and naturalness, without making the public think about who recorded it or if there is another version of what is registered. During the beginning of the 20th century, the publication of magazines such as *Look* and *Life* emphasized a documentary style of photography, presenting objectivity, the search for social truths and affinity with reality (BRENNEN, 2010, p. 74). “As photographs began to provide objective news accounts, bolstering the authority of journalism, they acquired an aura of reality, truth, and objectivity documenting important events for readers.” (BRENNEN, 2010, p. 74).

For Tuchman, objectivity is a strategic ritual, a professional routine procedure, protecting journalists from the risks of their profession, which is specific and sensitive regarding this objective of objectivity. Considering that an event can affect the journalist's ability to carry out their tasks of observing and reporting the event in the news, journalists seek to overcome or circumvent any pressures that fall on them, following work strategies identified with objective news (TUCHMAN, 1993, p. 78). For example, a) verify the facts, b) recognize parties in conflict and differentiate their respective claims to truth, c) consider the evidence that corroborates the statements collected, d) correctly report quotes from third parties, distinguishing them from the journalist's statements, e) structure and organize information with coherence and clarity, prioritizing the most relevant facts and distinguishing facts from opinions. But the supposed objectivity of photography, which is based on its umbilical connection to the reality captured by the camera, is illusory (FREUND, 1980, p. 4).

A verbal or non-verbal, textual or visual message, composed of words or images, is based on a structure of meaning that can reveal objectivity (neutrality) and ethicality in its interpretation. Depending on what is expressed when saying or showing, analogically copying reality, “as if the analog were a factor of resistance to the investment of values”, “this structural paradox coincides with an ethical paradox”, according to Barthes (1977, p. 19). Aiming to be neutral in value terms or avoiding expressing value judgments (or subjectivity, perspective, position) is to prefer to represent (on the image production side) and interpret (on the image reception side) reality in an analogical or factual way. Therefore, Barthes questions how it is possible for photography to be simultaneously “objective” and “invested”, “natural” and “cultural”.

The relevance of issues of impartiality and objectivity in journalistic activity and practice is justified because they are concepts commonly associated with the political or ideological role of the news media, according to Hackett (1993, p. 102). News impartiality and objectivity are guiding criteria to remove intrusion, subjective interpretation and the opinion of journalists and their respective media bodies from the desire to present factual texts and images.

As Breed (1993, p. 153) recognizes, ethical standards concern the journalist's obligation to readers and to his profession, and include ideas such as responsibility, impartiality, accuracy, fair play and objectivity. Newsworthiness criteria or news values have to do directly with the ethics of the journalist's professional activity. The news becomes a value, as Breed argues, as journalists talk about ethics, objectivity, and the relative value of various newspapers, but not when you must go in search of news (BREED, 1993, p. 159).

For Vattimo, the images of the world given to us by the media constitute the very objectivity of the world. According to him, “instead of moving towards self-transparency, the society of human sciences and generalized communication has moved towards what, at least in general, can be called the ‘fabulation of the world’” (VATTIMO, 1992, p. 32). The images of the world that the media provide to us constitute the objectivity of the world, and not just different interpretations of a “reality” that is somehow “given”. However, this objectivity of the world that images provide will be yet another way of seeing a world, a perspective, a regime of visibility that is different from what constitutes reality itself.

In photography you can choose the subject, the framing and the angle, but you cannot intervene inside the object. As Sontag (2005, p. 22) states in *On Photography*, “to photograph is to confer importance”. The denotation of photography is purer. According to Barthes, human’s interventions in the photograph (framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed) belong to the plane of connotation and “the absence of a code clearly reinforces the myth of photographic ‘naturalness’: the scene is there, captured mechanically, not humanly (the mechanical is here a guarantee of objectivity).” (BARTHES, 1977, p. 44).

Barthes distinguishes between cultural code and non-cultural code to highlight the specific nature of photography, as photography installs, not an awareness of the thing being there (which every copy could provoke), but an awareness of having-been-there: “The type of consciousness the photograph involves is indeed truly unprecedented, since it establishes not a consciousness of the *being-there* of the thing (which any copy could provoke) but an awareness of its *having-been-there*.” (BARTHES, 1977, p. 44).

In *Journalism and new media*, Pavlik (2001, p. 93) highlights that traditional newsworthiness criteria, such as objectivity, characterize responsible journalism that seeks to avoid bias and sensationalism and, instead, promote ethical values, such as equity when correct, complete and balanced journalistic coverage is presented that reflects all sides of an issue. According to Pavlik, the journalism in the digital age raises ethical questions: objectivity, fairness, and accuracy (PAVLIK, 2001, p. 93). For Pavlik, the fundamental standards that define responsible journalism are typical of an ethical press, whether online or offline, which must be guided by the search for the truth.

The question of the literalness of the photographic image is paradoxical. The image is supposedly objective and reveals a non-objective world. Photography technology reveals the dissimilarity between image and reality. Photography is the most artificial image. According to Baudrillard, in *Impossible Exchange*: “The miracle of the photograph, of that allegedly

‘objective’ image, is that through it the world shows itself to be radically non-objective. It is the photographer’s objective lens which, paradoxically, reveals the non-objectivity of the world.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2011, p. 183).

When choosing, the photographer can resort to criteria that are unrelated to the camera. For example, it can resort to aesthetic, political, epistemological criteria. Its intention will be to produce beautiful, or politically engaged, or informative images. When the photographer produces his photographs for a particular newspaper that has a large audience, he may believe that he is using the newspaper as his medium. The newspaper, however, may be using his photographs to illustrate its news. According to Flusser, as the photographer knows that only photographs that fit the newspaper’s editorial line will be published, he will surreptitiously try to introduce his own aesthetic, political and epistemological concerns into the photographs.

If photographs are technical images that transcode concepts into surfaces, according to Flusser, they presuppose the subsequent phase of decoding, and decoding the images is to discover what the concepts mean and what they mean is produced by the amalgamation of the photographer’s and the device’s coding intentions. Photography is, therefore, a message that articulates both coding intentions and as long as there is no photographic criticism that reveals this ambiguity of the photographic code, the device’s intention will prevail over human intention.

4. The technical image and its mediating role

“The technical image is an image produced by apparatuses.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 14). Technical images are different from traditional images. For Flusser, colour photographs are on a higher level of abstraction than black-and-white ones. Black-and-white photographs are more concrete and, therefore, truer: “they reveal their theoretical origin more clearly, and vice versa: The ‘more genuine’ the colours of the photograph become, the more untruthful they are, the more they conceal their theoretical origin.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 44).

Technical images are produced by apparatuses, i.e. “things that are produced”, “things that are produced (brought forward) out of the available natural world”, and the totality of such things can be referred to as culture (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 22). For Flusser (2012, p. 22), apparatuses are part of a culture and there are two distinguishable kinds of cultural objects: “the ones that are good for consumption (consumer goods) and the ones that are good for producing consumer goods (tools)”. Both are “‘good’ for something”, the two have in common that they are “valuable”, “they are as they should be, i.e. they have been produced intentionally”. The

camera is a tool whose intention is to produce photographs. It is an apparatus which intention is not to change the world but to change the meaning of the world (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 25). Its intention is symbolic. “The photographic camera can be seen as an apparatus, a black box within which a series of transformations takes place.” (FINGER, GULDIN and BERNARDO, 2011, P. 101).

Photographers create, process, and store symbols. In the process of creation, objects are produced, i.e. objects that have not been consumed but that have served as carriers of information. These objects are not an end but a means. Currently this sort of activity is being taken over by apparatuses and, as a result, “the objects of information created in this way are becoming more and more efficient and more and more extensive, and they are able to program and control all the work in the old sense” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 25). The camera is programmed to produce photographs, and every photograph is a realization of one of the possibilities contained within the program of the camera. “The number of such possibilities is large, but it is nevertheless finite: It is the sum of all those photographs that can be taken by a camera.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 26).

Flusser compares the activity of photographing to playing chess. Like the photographers, chess players pursue new possibilities (moves) in the program of chess. Photographers play with the camera. The camera is not a tool but a plaything, and a photographer is not a worker but a player: not *Homo faber* but *Homo ludens* (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 27).

The camera is a smart tool and demonstrates the robotization of the photographer’s work. The camera liberates the photographer for play because it creates images automatically. “Photographers no longer need, like painters, to concentrate on a brush but can devote themselves entirely to playing with the camera.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 29). For Flusser, the work of imprinting the image onto the surface happens automatically.

There are two different and interweaving programs in the camera: one motivates the camera into taking pictures; the other one permits the photographer to play (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 29). The latter is more decisive than the former. But beyond these are further programs: “that of the photographic industry that programmed the camera; that of the industrial complex that programmed the photographic industry; that of the socio-economic system that programmed the industrial complex; and so on” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 29). Therefore, explains Flusser, the camera functions on behalf of the photographic industry, which functions on behalf of the industrial complex, which functions on behalf of the socio-economic apparatus, and so on.

It is the rules of the game, the chess program, that makes the camera capable of being played with, i.e. that makes the game possible. Therefore, the power has moved from the owner of objects to the programmer and the operator, according to Flusser. The game of using symbols has become a power game and “photographers have power over those who look at their photographs, they program their actions; and the camera has power over the photographers, it programs their acts” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 30). “This shift of power from the material to the symbolic is what characterizes what we call the ‘information society’ and ‘post-industrial imperialism’.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 30).

The apparatus is a complex plaything; its game consists of combinations of the symbols contained within its program. Fully automated apparatuses can do without human intervention, and many apparatuses require the human being as a player and a functionary, points out Flusser. “Apparatuses were invented to simulate specific thought processes.” (FLUSSER, 2012, p. 31). All apparatuses, including the camera, are calculating machines, “artificial intelligences”.

5. Technical image and truth

What does it mean for a photograph to be true? For Flusser, truth is a relationship between a statement and its meaning. For example, a statement is true if and only if it agrees in some way with its meaning. However, in a photograph, the relationship between a statement and its meaning is even more opaque than a statement or a scientific proposition, because “an entire complex of apparatuses and their criteria as well as photographers and their intentions” is interpolated in the space between a photograph and its meaning (FLUSSER, 2002, p. 47). “Therefore, it makes little sense to ask if a photograph is true or false, for example, ‘posed’.” (FLUSSER, 2002, p. 47). Photography turns the relationship between statement and meaning completely around. The photograph does not discover meanings, but rather, it gives them; it does not matter if they are true or false – even if this could be established. For Flusser, the critical question is: which meaning does it intend to give according to which criteria? “The criterion “true” – the value “truth” – is no longer operative in photography and must be abandoned”, as well as the criteria “good” and “beautiful”, states Flusser (2002, p. 47). Accordingly, it makes little sense to ask if a photograph is truth.

Flusser coined the term “technical image” to describe the way that modern technology, particularly imaging technologies like photography and television, has transformed our perception of the world and our understanding of truth. The concept of technical image is central to Flusser’s philosophy, and it has significant implications for how we perceive truth and reality.

In Flusser's view, the technical image refers to images that are produced by machines, such as cameras, and are not direct representations of reality but rather interpretations created through a technical process. He believed that these images have the power to shape our understanding of truth and reality because they mediate our perception of the world. Flusser argues that in the era of the technical image, traditional notions of truth as correspondence between an image and its referent are challenged.

For Flusser, the technical image mediates our perception of reality. Images produced by machines are not direct reflections of the world but are interpretations created through technical processes. As a result, our understanding of truth becomes mediated by these images, and what we consider as real or true is influenced by the way these images are constructed.

Traditional images, such as paintings, are often seen as representations that aim to capture reality. However, Flusser argues that the technical image is more about interpretation than representation. These images are the result of codes, algorithms, and technical operations, which means they are subject to the intentions of those who create and control the technologies.

In *Gestures*, Flusser points out that both photography and painting come from very complex and contradictory movements. "There are objective phases in the act of painting and subjective phases in the act of photographing, in fact, to an extent that makes the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity more than problematic." (FLUSSER, 2014, p. 73). The distinction between painting and photography is necessary to understand our relationship to the world. Such distinction relates to the gestures photography and painting elicit. The photographer can manipulate the image and its visual elements. But the manipulation does not mean that the photograph cannot be an objective image (FLUSSER, 2014, p. 82).

The prevalence of technical images contributes to the construction of new realities. Flusser suggests that the way images are produced and disseminated through technology shapes our perception of reality. This challenges the notion of a single objective reality and highlights the multiplicity of realities that can be generated through different technological processes.

According to Flusser, the technical image obscures the process of its creation. Unlike traditional images, where the process of creation is often evident (e.g., brushstrokes in a painting), the complex technical processes involved in producing technical images are hidden from the viewer. This loss of transparency can lead to a decreased awareness of the constructed nature of these images.

The concept of authenticity is also challenged by the technical images. Flusser argues that the traditional notion of an authentic image, as capturing an unmediated reality, becomes

problematic in the context of images produced by machines. Authenticity is no longer solely about accurately reflecting reality; it also involves an understanding of the technological processes that give rise to the image.

Flusser's notion of the technical image suggests that our relationship with truth and reality has become more complex and mediated due to technological advancements in imaging. The images we encounter in our daily lives are not neutral representations but are influenced by the technologies that produce them, shaping our understanding of what is true and real.

6. Conclusions

By exploring the concept of objectivity in the context of images, particularly in photography, Flusser highlights the pseudo-objectivity of photography. He argues that photography appears to be objective because it captures a visual representation of the world. However, this objectivity is deceptive because the photograph itself is a product of human choices and interpretations. The photographer selects what to include in the frame, the angle, the lighting, and the moment of capture, all of which introduce subjectivity into the image-making process.

Flusser emphasizes the role of the photographic apparatus, including the camera and the technical processes involved in image creation. He argues that the apparatus influences the way we perceive and interpret reality. Different cameras, lenses, and techniques can produce different visual interpretations of the same subject, highlighting the subjectivity inherent in the medium.

According to Flusser, photographs are encoded messages rather than objective representations. These codes are created by the photographer's decisions and intentions, as well as the cultural and societal context in which the photograph is produced and viewed. Viewers interpret these codes subjectively, based on their own experiences and cultural background. Furthermore, the viewer's role in the interpretation of images is fundamental. Flusser believes that the act of viewing a photograph is an act of decoding and interpreting its message. Each viewer brings their own subjectivity to this process, and the meaning of an image can vary widely from one person to another.

In conclusion, Flusser's perspective on the objectivity of images, especially in photography, is critical of the notion that photographs offer a purely objective view of reality. Instead, he argues that photographs are products of human choices, cultural contexts, and technical processes, all of which introduce subjectivity into the image-making and viewing

process. Flusser encourages a deeper exploration of the codes and messages embedded in images and emphasizes the role of the viewer in interpreting and decoding these messages.

As we live in increasingly visual cultures and use images more frequently and more dependently through technical devices that not only facilitate the capture of images of everyday reality but also allow them to be edited instantly, this perspective that demystifies the myth of the objectification of the photographic image has more pertinence and relevance. Thus, the timeliness of Flusser's ideas and work is justified and is more useful for understanding how we conceive and understand the world through the images we produce, transmit and receive daily.

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