

Master's student in Social  
Anthropology Graduate Program,  
Universidade de São Paulo, São  
Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.

São Paulo: Fapesp,  
Editora da Universidade  
de São Paulo, 2016. 200 p.

**RAFAEL HUPSEL**

## **REVIEW**

**SILVA, WAGNER SOUZA E.**

*FOTO 0 | FOTO 1*

It's been a while since anthropology has been establishing a profitable dialogue with some author's ideas whose theories about photography had become canonic and thus inescapable. This approach has been an increasing practice to discuss photography's position in our discipline. Whether studying the ways modern anthropology had used photography at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century to invent the savage and primitive Other, whose exotic features were measured and cataloged by the camera lenses; or whether in the reflexive analysis about its position in fieldwork and in the constitution of the ethnographic practice's objective paradigms since the 1920 decade; or even in the ways currently the photographic image has been used in collaborative works between the anthropologist and their subjects, allowing to discuss the asymmetric that the photographic camera used to reify – it's notable that the anthropological eye over the photographic theorist's ideas oscillates between the appropriation of some of their concepts and the critique that the anthropological perspective imputes over their reflections about the photographic imagery.

Anyway, it's a fact that the critical thought that has formed around photography constitutes a undeniable contribution to anthropologists that investigates photographic images, which makes every original discussion welcome. The Wagner Souza e Silva's *Foto 0 | Foto 1* book, a result of his doctorate thesis presented to the School of Communication and Arts of the University of São Paulo (ECA-USP), certainly has the attribute to add a singular view to the widely explored

photography research field. Acting nowadays as teacher and researcher at ECA-USP, Wagner also acted as photographer of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (MAE-USP) for years, which certainly influenced the perspective of his ideas, as he himself admits.

The link between taking photographs and digital technology is already a concrete and widely diffused reality, as we can see by the number of images that flood the different media we access daily. Should we still consider the insertion of photographic technology as a survey object, given that apparently the discussion about the changes promoted in the photographic practice by this not so new technology seems increasingly surpassed? Or even, if all technology defines aspects that surround the image valuation, what value can be attributed to photographs in the digital universe? Both questions are presented in the book's introduction, and set the tone of the author's approach to the photographic theme: his emphasis on the technology and not on the image or on the act itself, like other authors. "Before being the practice of the image, photography is the practice of a technology" (Silva 2016, 19). Through this approach, his objective is to discuss photography's technological trajectory, surveying the way that this path reflects the making of identity of its practice, especially in the digital format.

The book is divided into two parts: "A Fotografia do 0 ao 1" (*The Photograph from 0 to 1*), reflecting on the photographic practice with film; and "A Fotografia do 1 ao 0" (*The Photograph from 1 to 0*), which deals with the most elementary features of digital photography. It is interesting that the author structures the book this way and the argument that permeates it, given the circular movement that this division implies: "(...) it starts from zero and goes to one, to then come back to zero" (Silva 2016, 19). According to him, his proposal cannot be understood as two distinct periods of photography, despite the attempt to create a chronological sequence to its trajectory. The author admits that certain specificities of the photographic technique arises a kind of resistance when you search for a historical linearity, because many features that define digital photography can be also present in film photography, as the reverse may also occurs.

The first part of the book introduces the definitions and the relations that the terms *technique* and *technology* establishes among each other: every technique, "the operational logic of the human's action in function of a desire, demands a technology to be operated" (Silva 2016, 27). Although presented as inseparable, the terms are positioned hierarchically, one in relation to other. To Silva, technique produces the technology at the same time that there is no technology that doesn't serve a technique. The idea is essential to the investigation that continues throughout the book:

if since its beginning until before its introduction into the digital realm, photography was much more a technology than a technique, it's worth asking if nowadays, by the simplification of its means of operations, it turns to be much more a technique than a technology. Silva goes throughout the history of the photographic technology, starting from an explanation of the principles of the directing of the light ray inside the camera, passing by the components of the photographic apparatus (lens, aperture, shutter etc.), and then makes a quick but instructive explanation about the changes in the photographic imagery sensitive surfaces, since the daguerreotype until the celluloid film, justified by the idea that the sensitive surface of the photographic image can be considered as the "convergent and radiator point of its technology and practice" (Silva 2016, 36).

The discussion about the difficulties in defining photographic genres results in profitable reflections, touching on points that reflect an increasingly interest in the contemporary discussions about photography. The definition of a genre, be it photojournalism, advertising photography or family albums, as the author exemplifies, would define the place of *photographies* much more than the place of *photography* itself. The idea that it can be understood as a phenomenon able to invade both the field of science and the field of art has a certain resonance with André Rouillé's (2009) ideas about "document photography" and "expression photography". The comment upon Roland Barthes (1980/2015) and Philippe Dubois's (1983/2012) theoretical standpoint, giving too much priority to the analysis of photographic imagery and to the reception act of them, allows Silva to situate his approach by the technique/technological bias, making reverse movement from the one adopted by these two canons of the photography image theory. "From the photos to photography" (Silva 2016, 83), in other words instead of stress its reception processes, he emphasizes the technology itself.

It's from the model proposed by the philosopher Vilém Flusser for an ontological distinction between photographic imagery and pictorial imagery that Silva builds the key arguments of the book. To Flusser, photographic imagery overlaps a whole kind of knowledge based on scientific texts. To understand this proposition, Silva summarizes how the philosopher frames the creation of the photographic technique in history, from the relation between text and imagery. It's precisely in mobilizing Flusser's thought as, in Silva's words, "a mapping of the photographic imagery" that his thesis begins to take an increasingly contingent and abstract route. In his most known work, *A Filosofia da caixa-preta*<sup>1</sup> (2002), the philosopher briefly presents some theories about the magical character of images and the manner they interpose our relation

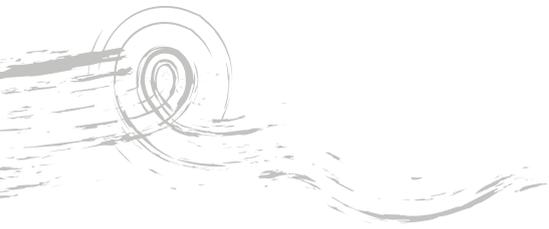
---

1. *Towards a philosophy of photography*

with the world, representing it and guiding us through it. Flusser also eludes to the rise of writing as an answer to image idolatry, debouching in an inevitable “writeolatry”, as hallucinatory as the idolatry that the advent of writing tried to suppress. Then, in the context of the crisis of text emerges the technical imagery, product of scientific texts and inaugurated by photography. Centered in this opposition, problematic and logocentric when we think about the great number of discussions that this theme rendered to anthropology, the idea of this movement between text and image turn the pivot of the theorization developed by Silva throughout his book. From Flusser’s statement that photography gives birth to the possibility of scientific texts to be transformed into technical images, “remagicizing” the texts, the author proposes to think about it as a language system evolution, photography itself “ontologically distinguishable from the word and the writing, but also liable of being articulated to create realities” (Silva 2016, 92).

In the second part of the book Silva composes a brief but very useful explanation about the function of digital photographic imagery, placing precisely in it “the core of the motivations that originates discussions and reflections about imagery attribute in the numerical universe” (Silva 2016, 113). Even if it’s presented printed on paper or displayed on a computer or on a cellphone screen, the fact that all the information that composes digital photography consists of binary encoded bits, means that materially it doesn’t exist. At this point, the wit in the way that the author “plays” (using a Flusser term) with this binary relation both in the title of the book as in its two-part division acquires a new contour. Silva starts from the statement about digital imagery’s “zero dimensionality” to engage a sinuous but provoking path that begins in the main changes that the birth of this new technology of image production has aroused both in the act of photographing and in our ulterior relations with the photos. These changes reside, as he affirms, in the paradox that the more complex and inaccessible the technology of photography becomes, the less laborious are the procedures to obtain an image.

It is interesting that Silva refuses the approaches of Barthes and Dubois to photography, over centered in the image’s reception processes, but he ends up appealing to the reading of *other images* to construct his approach as a technological practice. I don’t refer to the author’s analysis – very profitable and coherent with the book’s proposal, by the way – of the work of Joan Fontcuberta, Rosangela Rennó, Pedro Meyer, Breno Rotatori or collective Cia de Foto, among others, but to the way that he mobilizes the images created by Flusser: the rise of the writing as a way to cease image idolatry in the second millennium B.C., when people committed to the remembrance of images original function start to tear them apart to open the world’s vision to the concrete world hidden by then.



Whether in the “man’s cultural history”, when in a first moment mankind used to live in a world of volumes, using their hands to modify the objects, and then acting according to previously imagined projects and allowing the rise of their abstraction capacities, ending up in the beginning of the writing, the science and the “technoimages” that divide the the world in pre and post history.

These are the images that serve as an anchor for Silva, through a sophisticated reading of Flusser, a continuum movement – between image and text, concrete and abstract, profundity and superficiality, science and philosophy – that permeates the whole book and reaches its climax in a deep dialogue with Heidegger to propose us to think about the “techno-image” (and consequently photography) as philosophy of an another order, born from a language that is also from another order and that guides us to question the modern subject and its production modes. Silva’s thesis, based on the images provided by Flusser, notably mythical as founders of a new order, become itself a new image, sometimes solid sometimes too fluid to let us take it in accurately. It’s precisely in the fact that digital photography doesn’t exist, with it’s main idea of “this was” proposed by Barthes (2015, 69) being substituted by the idea of “this is *nothing*” proposed by Silva throughout his book, that allows the author to use the Flusser “images” to try to capture it and explain it in its zero dimensionality. It’s not about pointing a demerit of “Foto 0 | Foto 1”, but to verify that the interior of the camera can generate polysemic images, ambiguous and sometimes convincing as photography itself.

**translation**  
Rafael Hupsel  
**proofreading**  
Ben McGee



## REFERENCES

- Barthes, Roland. 2015. *A câmara clara: nota sobre a fotografia*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira.
- Dubois, Philippe. 2012. *O ato fotográfico e outros ensaios*. 14. ed. Campinas, SP: Editora Papirus.
- Flusser, Vilém. 2002. *Filosofia da caixa preta*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará.
- Rouillé, André. 2009. *A fotografia: entre documento e arte contemporânea*. São Paulo: Editora Senac São Paulo.
- Silva, Wagner Souza e. 2016. *Foto 0 | Foto 1*. São Paulo: Fapesp, Editora da Universidade de São Paulo.

## RAFAEL HUPSEL

Photographer, graduated in Photography from Centro Universitário/Senac, Master’s student in Social Anthropology at the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology of the University of São Paulo and researcher of the Visual Anthropology Group (GRAVI-USP).