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**Expanding photography – Flusser and Polish intermedia  
photography**

In 1991, the Second East-West Photoconference “European Exchange” in the gallery Photo-Medium-Art took place. The meeting consisted of two parts: an exhibition titled “New Spaces of Photography” and a symposium “Ethos of Photography”. The organizers, Jerzy Olek and Romuald Kutera gathered artists and photography theoreticians both from Poland and beyond “an Iron Curtain”. Among the invited guests were Gottfried Jäger, Joan Fontcuberta, Antonín Dufek and Stefan Morawski. There was also Vilém Flusser. Although he ultimately did not reach Wrocław, he sent the text of his lecture. He wrote in it: “This is my first invitation to speak in what used to be Eastern Europe” (Flusser 1991: 24).

Flusser's concepts fit perfectly into the way of thinking about photographic images that became the leading trend in Central Europe in the 1990s. His observations concerning the creative role of a photographer, the concept of the universe of technical images, a community of fields of art based on media and, above all, resistance against the domination of media, found a positive feedback among artists whose art originated in conceptual, performative and “expanded photography” approaches. It also created a good foundation for cooperation between artists and academics. Andreas Müller-Pohle, the publisher of *European Photography* magazine, represented contemporary creative photography, curating exhibitions and attending conferences in the 1990s. He had a significant role in the warm reception of Flusser's philosophy in Poland<sup>1</sup>.

This does not mean, of course, that Flusser's philosophy was attractive only to photographers. As Przemysław Wiatr rightly points out: “[The success achieved in the field of philosophy of photography (M.M.)] classified Flusser as a theoretician of media photography, or at best a theoretician of media, in a way hiding the broader context of his thought” (Wiatr 2018: 17). Although references to Flusser as the one of the most original thinkers of the late twentieth century were less frequent than those of contemporaries such as Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio or Gianni Vattimo (Piotr Zawojski writes about this fragmentary presence of Flusser's thought, Zawojski 2018: 33-34), it was his view that was most interesting for researchers reflecting on postmodernity.

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<sup>1</sup> The exhibition curated by Müller-Pohle, entitled: “Staging: Contemporary Photography in the Federal Republic of Germany” (1988), can be mentioned here. It travelled to Warsaw, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Kraków and Poznań, and also accompanied the 4th Photography Biennale in Poznań (2005).

Apart from Zawojcki, mentioned here, one should not forget Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, Andrzej Gwoździ, and Wojciech Chyła, among others. The most important issue for them was the location of technology in the circle of humanistic reflection. More than predicting the future, they were interested in the consequences of a complicated dependence of man on various “apparatuses”, threatening human freedom of thought and creation. Although we should agree with Przemysław Wiatr's observation that associating Flusser only with media philosophers can be restrictive, it is impossible not to notice that the philosophy of Vilém Flusser played a specific role in Polish humanities, one reason, among others, being that it had a stronger impact on artistic creation than on theoretical texts.

The aim of this article is to trace the convergence and influence of Vilém Flusser's thinking on the oeuvre of Polish artists using photography, with an emphasis on “Polish intermedia photography” a movement initiated by Stefan Wojnecki. In the article, I will describe the specificity of Polish intermedia, and then I will show how works of Poznań artists such as Stefan Wojnecki and Piotr Wolyński bear out selected themes of Flusser's philosophy, such as the universe of technical images, the meaning of photographic gesture, apparatus and creative freedom.

## **Intermedia photography**

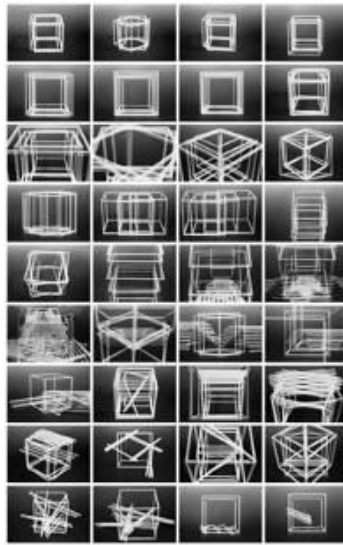
Although the readers are well acquainted with Vilém Flusser's philosophy of photography, its impact on practical activities of artists in Poland may be unknown. I will therefore start with a closer look at the background of this photographic trend and then, using selected examples of works, integrate them with Flusser's theoretical concepts.

The art of the second half of the twentieth century abounds in activities aimed at violating and overcoming the divisions between traditional and emerging fields of artistic creativity: painting, drawing; avant-garde and neo-avant-garde action art; sculpture and object art. I am concerned here particularly with links between technical media (video, film, photography, film and digital animation) and traditional media (painting, sculpture, object). The exhibition and symposium mentioned at the beginning (as well as earlier meetings initiated in the Foto-Medium-Art gallery, e.g. “Border States of Photography”, 1977; “Photography as an Art Medium”, 1977) were examples of such violation of the division of disciplines in photography as art.<sup>2</sup> They suggest the role played by theoretical reflection on photographic practice.

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<sup>2</sup> This term is used to describe photographic activities conducted on demand of museums and art galleries, (Wells 2004: 245-294).

It is worth noticing, however, that events of this kind were a continuation of the avant-garde artistic practice of showing photographs without frames, characteristic of twentieth-century practice. The image functions here in reflexive relationships with other fields of art. On the one hand, it seeks its own language, on the other, it boldly confronts expectations with a poetic text, a visual metaphor, or a gallery space (Czartoryska 2002: 95-97). Examples of the former approach might be Jerzy Olek's "elementary photography" or Gottfried Jäger's "generative photography", which somehow decompose anticipated structures of light and space into basic elements within the photographic frame.



Jerzy Olek, *Surprise of Vision / Zdziwienie widzenia*, 1988, courtesy of the artist

An example of the latter approach can be Zbigniew Dłubak's *Iconosphere* (1967), a labyrinth made up of photographic prints, or Stefan Wojnecki's *Hiperphotography* (1978), in which the viewer was confronted with large-format magnifications of hand details.



Stefan Wojnecki, *Hiperphotography/Hiperfotografia*, Galeria BWA, Poznań 1978, courtesy of the artist

Such approaches to photography give rise to the trend of intermedia photography, within which framework of artists “extend” the boundaries of the medium, drawing attention to its formal and socio-cultural contexts. The term itself has been popularized through the exhibition “Polish Inter-Media Photography of the Eighties. Diffuse Photography”<sup>3</sup>, organized on the initiative of Stefan Wojnecki and Wojciech Makowiecki at BWA Gallery (currently the Municipal Gallery ‘Arsenal’) in Poznań. The exhibition catalogue perfectly illustrates the changes taking place in visual arts at a time of the cultural, political, economic and technological breakthroughs. The exhibition was also an expression of the originality of Polish artists’ thinking (Makowiecki 1988). The curators were undoubtedly inspired by the term ‘intermedia’ popularized in 1965 and developed in 1981 by Dick Higgins to describe the practices of such artists as those from Fluxus, or of Robert Rauschenberg and Allan Kaprow. Higgins, pointing to the correspondence between visual arts, performative arts, poetry and music, wrote: “Much of the best work being produced today seems to fall between media” (Higgins 2001: 49). But where Higgins treated technical media, e.g. film, photography or video, simply as instruments, the Polish artists were pointedly concerned with the difference between them and traditional media. In a commentary from 1981, he added that with time intermedia had been identified with ‘mixed media’ (Higgins 2001: 52). Meanwhile, Wojnecki and Makowiecki focused on showing those artists who go beyond the boundaries of a photographic frame, going towards an object, environment, or an event. However, traditional photographers were not excluded from the group of over seventy artists whose works were shown (Łuczak 2011:149-150). That is why the participants in the exhibition included artists from neo-avant-garde circles, such as Andrzej Lachowicz, Natalia LL, Krzysztof Cichosz, Józef Robakowski, an anarchic group of performers called Łódź Kaliska, the “elementarists” Jerzy Olek and Zbigniew Rytka, the documentary filmmaker Zofia Rydet, and the maker of a critical video, Zbigniew Libera. The works presented at the exhibition could not be inscribed in one current of research: they reached both back to the tradition of modernist research into the autonomy of photography and forward to a postmodern interplay with the past. It embraced both staging and realism. According to the subtitle of the exhibition, they testified to the dispersal of photography. Alicja Kępińska wrote in the introduction as follows: “Photography mimics the whole culture: it sets off in different directions; it covers its tracks; we cannot pin it down in some definite place; it slips out of our hands and through the pattern of our habits” (Kępińska 1988: 7).

The popularity of the exhibition caused the concept of intermedia to be widely discussed by Polish authors in the context of changes taking place in aesthetics, visual technologies and,

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<sup>3</sup> Original spelling, after the title of the exhibition catalogue.

finally, in the broadly understood visual culture (Chmielecki 2008)<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, the term was redefined in juxtaposition with the concept of multimedia (Kluszczyński 1999: 199-200), the already mentioned “mixed media” or post-media. The theoretical considerations presented during “New Spaces of Photography” and the works of artists gave this state of inter-media relations a strong footing. Regardless of the specific term we choose, they all refer to the state of media identified by Flusser as the one functioning in the “universe of technical images”. Such a perception of artistic creativity was important, as it opened the possibility for artists to move freely between the media: from photography to film, digital and photochemical recording, or between visual and audio spheres. Interestingly, this way of thinking goes hand in hand with the *still/moving field* (or *still-moving paradigm*) popular today. The concept of intermedia and post-media photography emphasized the freedom of the artist, whose duty was to break free from the paralyzing thought of the technological regime and various (cultural) “machine programmes”. Intermedia photography was first of all the field of reflection on the nature of the visual medium.

The popularity of Flusser's concept, and thus the perception of its relation with the described current of photography can also be explained by the fact that his reflections on technology were an important alternative to Roland Barthes' phenomenological reflections dominating the field of art, Susan Sontag's critical theory or John Berger's sociology. However, it is worth remembering that Flusser's concept cannot be directly applied to photography. As Piotr Zawojcki wrote: “For Flusser, photography and, above all, the reflection on it, is a kind of philosophical laboratory of thought, meditation on the state of the post-historic world, in which technical images can play a role of special signposts” (Zawojcki 2007: 46). Such an approach allows us to go beyond technical and aesthetic studies of photography, paying attention to its ontological aspects, especially the machine-human relation. In photographic practice, thinking about intermedia takes on various, not necessarily new media forms. At the turn of the eighties and nineties, Polish art photography as an art displayed a kind of distrust towards digital ways of recording a photographic image. Gradually, with the spread of use and decreasing costs of equipment, digital techniques have become an important component in the repertoire of artistic means used by artists. Those years can therefore be described as a time of differentiation of creative attitudes: apart from direct techniques (e.g. photograms), which originate in avant-garde and neo-avant-garde traditions, pinhole photography and an art of photographic objects, artists experiment on the borderline between old and new technology. There are also groups of artists who faithfully pursue the tradition of photochemical photography in an effort to resist widespread digitalization. Polish authors writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century about changes in photography

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<sup>4</sup> An institutional manifestation of the popularity of the term (in spite of Higgins' claim that “There was and could be no intermedial movement”, Higgins 2001: 52) was the appointment of Intermedia Chairs (in Poznań) and Intermedia Departments (Gdańsk, Kraków) at the Academies of Fine Arts in Poland.

as an art place emphasis on the transformation of the image distribution system and the importance of the question about originality/copy (Lechowicz 1998: 134), as well as on the influence of digitalization on the artistic document and the growing role of social communication (then these were mainly blogs). At the same time these authors observe an increasing interest in traditional photochemical processes: “lomography” (photographs taken by simple compact cameras of the Soviet brand called “Lomo”, produced from 1983 to the end of the decade of 1980s.) and lenseless photography<sup>5</sup>, and interpret the popularity of this response as a move to reinstate the creative role of an individual in photographic creation (Zjeżdżalka 2005: 142). The “diffusion” in the title of the exhibition asserts the lack of a clearly dominant photographic trend and the abundance of concurrent approaches.

## Point structures

“The objective world as the perceived one is therefore a result of the nervous system calculations and in this sense becomes its projection.” (Flusser 2018: 65).

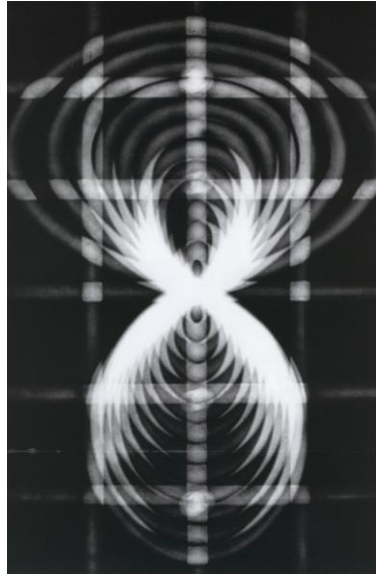
The transformations taking place in photography described above are perfectly illustrated by Stefan Wojnecki's theoretical and artistic practice. Since the end of the 1980s, the artist from Poznań has been reflecting on the visual language of photography and ways of perceiving reality. In his article from 1996, entitled “Photography understood as a partial, mental model of reality” he wrote: “Photography was the first technical image in history. Today, such inventions as the film, X-ray, radar, sonar, holography, electronic media, printing and xerography claim this provenance. It turns out that drawing with the impulses of a point (grainy) image is a common feature of all of them, including the visual image” (Wojnecki 2007: 202).

Although the author does not quote Flusser, the text resonates with the reflection of the Czech philosopher that there is a community of images based on their structural features. However, Wojnecki broadens the meaning of the image so that it can also include mental, imaginary images. That is why he proposes the term impulseographic image, which includes both technical and visual images (i.e. those created on the retina of an eye). Flusser seems to have been thinking along the same lines when he wrote: “The tips of some of our nerves receive stimuli in the form of what we now call ‘digital code’: that there are only point impulses which are received or not, and therefore there are no strong and weak impulses, but only a stimulus or lack thereof.” (Flusser 2018: 65).

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<sup>5</sup> Lenseless photography includes various photogram techniques, in which images are created directly on photosensitive material, as well as pinhole photography, widely practiced in the 1970s using devices constructed on the basis of *the camera obscura* phenomenon.

The concept of an impulseographic image allows us to connect the external world with the mental image and explain our reaction to the elements of reality that we perceive. As we know, in Flusser's concept it was supposed to help formulate a thesis about the lack of meaning contained on the surface of technical images and about its presence "behind" them, i.e. about the journey of understanding "towards" meanings, whereas in the Wojnecki's interpretation the impulsive character of mental experience opens the field for artistic creation, i.e. it allows us to see what is hidden to the eye.



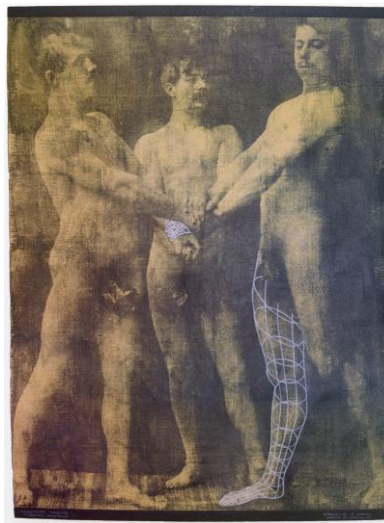
Stefan Wojnecki, *Fluctuations of the oscillogram*/ *Fluktuacje oscylogramu*, 1964

In the work *Fluctuations of the oscillogram* from the series *Impulseographic images*. (1964) Wojnecki photographed a graphic representation of changes in physical values. It is a direct record of the impulses of reality, the features of which we wouldn't realize without visual processing. According to Flusser, it is not only the point structure that define technical images, they also share the scientific provenance of images and the ability to model imaginary reality. The basis of the image in question is therefore both the scientific theory, without which the image would not have been created, and also the artistic imagination, which allows us to see symbolic meanings in the image.

The interest in linking science and art played an important role in Wojnecki's artistic output. A graduate in physics from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, he was already developing techniques for recording physical phenomena (radiation, or structure of matter) and ways of translating them into artistic practice from his first works in the 1950s. He pursued research conducted with the use of photochemical techniques (such as the construction of a shutter with the opening time of up to  $2 \times 10^{-8}$  seconds a year) later in analyses of digital systems, and also took advantage of the possibility of freely using and combining different photographic imaging

techniques, such as direct photography (photograms), pinhole and lens photography, photochemical and digital photography.

Flusser did not claim that all technical images are the same, but that all of them are models that pursue the same goal, i.e. the concretisation of the “world of imagination” (Flusser 1994: 60-61). Wojnecki thought similarly. The question of juxtaposition of the model and recording of reality is particularly important here, as Wojnecki believes that photography is basically only a record of the intensity of light rays, mentally decoded into information about shapes, perspectives and space, thanks to which images acquire cultural meaning for us. Thus, a photographic image provides models of thinking and creating visions of reality (Wojnecki 2005: 229).



Stefan Wojnecki, *The Trace of a Quotation, the Quotation of a Trace / Ślad cytatem, cytat śladem*, 1990-1992, courtesy of the artist

We can use the example of one of the works from the cycle *The Trace of a Quotation, the Quotation of a Trace* (1990-92) to explain the relation of modelling thinking. Wojnecki works here in several stages: first, the archival photochemical photograph is scanned and developed in a graphic program, then irradiated by means of an enlarger on the photosensitive surface of the canvas covered with emulsion. The original photograph serves here as a model for the final work. Wojnecki adds another level to the situation of taking photographs, which is described by Flusser: “Therefore, one can say that a photographer invented a model of a house, just like a computer operator designed a model of an airplane, which will be built. [...] A photographer imagines a house as it probably stands outside, in an objective environment. Then he takes his camera in his hand to ‘conceptualize’ his idea. (translate into terms such as ‘perspective’ or ‘exposure time’). The camera automatically translates these terms. And the photographer presses



a button to force the camera to make these calculations, to represent this house in the image” (Flusser 1994: 61).

Wojnecki ‘conceptualizes’ technical data and forces imaging devices (enlarger, computer) to realize and materialize the model created by him. The conceptualization and concretization is another feature of photography, which is important for both the philosopher from Prague and the artist from Poznań. For Wojnecki, concrete nature is the basis of the ‘photorealistic’ image, not one that is a representation of reality, but one that seems probable in human perception. Therefore both the documentation of an event taking place in space and its computer-generated simulation are photorealistic. (Wojnecki 2007: 230). On the other hand, the terms ‘concreteness’ and its opposite, ‘abstraction’, appear frequently in Flusser's texts. The philosopher prefers them to the designations “true” and “false”. He replaces them with the “concretization of what is abstract” (Flusser 1994: 58). In his essay “Man as a Subject or Project”, he insists that the two terms should replace the metaphysical distinction between a subject and an object. “There is no difference between what is ‘real’ and what is ‘fictional’ anymore (between sciences and arts), now everything is the matter of the extent of realization” (Flusser 2018: 69).

The accuracy of the observations of Flusser and Wojnecki regarding the nature of photorealistic picture can be illustrated by the artistic practice of another representative of the intermedia photography trend – Piotr Wolyński



Piotr Wolyński, *By Human Measurement/Ludzka miara I*, 2010.

Piotr Wolyński, in his series of photographs *By Human Measurement*, makes a digital photomontage in which he transforms views of real space. The photographer documents Poznań monuments, and then digitally ‘moves’ them to places where they do not exist in reality. Thus, for example, the monument of Adam Mickiewicz from the square named after him can be seen on the side of a peripheral road. Can he treat this photograph as false? After all, the view presented

by Wolyński is realistic (Wojnecki would say – photorealistic), and therefore probable for someone who does not know Poznań. Wolyński writes that the problem of reference (i.e. real objects) is secondary. What matters is what senses will be given to the images by the artist, or how he will create new “models of domesticating, humanising images” (Wolyński 2010: 138). In *By Human Measurement*, the photographer does not talk about specific monuments, but about how people use them to monumentalize or degrade their own historical symbols.

Wolyński’s performances are concrete in that they discover contents important for human experience, although they show things and objects that do not exist in reality. In this sense they are therefore close to the approach of Flusser, whose theory of media analysis is rooted in the spirit of phenomenology. Przemysław Wiatr expresses this apparent contradiction as follows: “‘Concreteness’ means, therefore, that it is not possible – or at least not completely – in phenomenological research, but also in any other way, to abstract from a particular experience” (Wiatr 2018: 68). It is worth mentioning that Flusser’s concreteness has a different character from Baudrillard’s simulation. This is because the simulation, as we remember from the “Precession of simulacra”, had nothing to do with reality, it was the state “after” reality. In Flusser’s work, by contrast, “concrete” originates in the world of objects.

But we should return to intermedia photographers. Reading the texts and looking at Wojnecki’s artistic practice one can see that the concept of intermedia photography was influenced not only by Flusser’s reflection, but also strongly by the ideas of Flusser’s collaborator – Andreas Müller-Pohle. In the article “Analogue, Digital, Projective” he distinguishes three forms of photographic image functioning: analogue, digital and projection. The first, analogue corresponds to the way of perceiving reality, in the second the image is translated into algorithms. The third phase is the most interesting because photography becomes a projection, so it participates in a state in which free transformation becomes possible. Müller-Pohle writes: “digitization can be interpreted as the perfection of photography: photography participates in the digital universality and gains new, expanded functions. If, in the analogue state, it was mainly a technique of reference and a visual aid, it now becomes a technique of preference and an instrument of thought” (Müller-Pohle 1996: on-line).

Wojnecki’s and Wolyński’s realizations are designed to encourage the viewer to reflect on the images and the medium through which the images are produced by visual means. One can say that what unites Flusser, Wojnecki, Wolyński and Müller-Pohle is the conviction that technical images not only allow recording reality, but they also model reality. Of course, both the philosopher and photographers know that it is not the machines themselves that do it, but the people who use them. So there are “imagers” who program machines and seduce “machines for the production of unbelievable situations contained in their program”. (Flusser 1994: 57).

Photographers are imaginers who do not succumb to the magic of cameras; on the contrary, they are sorcerers who know how to enchant others.

## Apparatus and man

“Ever since man has been a human, he has always been subject to objects” (Flusser 2018: 61).

In Flusser’s theory, extraordinary importance is placed on the dialectic relationship between a human being and an object. Man uses objects, so he exercises power over them, but at the same time objects become indispensable to him, so he is dependent on them. In this way he realizes the most important goal of his own existence, i.e. he plays a game. However, man is not so much a “*homo ludens*”, i.e. man having fun, but rather man of play. The difference is nuanced, because as we remember playing in the theory of culture (e.g. Huizinga) does not only serve entertainment. In Flusser’s theory, the assumption of the “playful” character of a human being is deepened, because the play serves to create identity, to realize the “self”. As such, however, it cannot merely reproduce, conform to the rules, follow the game’s instructions. It must be creative. “The playing human of the future will find himself in the other through the creative game” (Flusser 1992: online). Flusser’s games are chess in which a player makes up an unpredictable move (Flusser 2000: 27).

Before I return to photography, I will allow myself a short digression about Flusser’s considerations of design in relation to the idea of the playful in culture. In the essay “About the word ‘design’” (Flusser 2016), Flusser refers to the sources of the term in order to understand the role of design in culture. He is curious why today’s Latin-English version of the term dominates other language versions, such as ‘*Gestalt*’, ‘*façon*’, or, one could add, the Polish word ‘*projektowanie*’. He explains it by the association with deceit embedded in its meaning. According to him, ‘design’ belongs to the same group of words as *mechos* (a device that could have been the Trojan horse), or Greek *techné*, translated as *ars* into Latin. For the Flusser, design becomes a manifestation of human cunning and trickery. Especially in this justification Flusser plays with associations, reminding that the word *ars* is related to the *articulum* (a knuckle). “Hence,” he writes, “‘articulate’ means to skilfully twist one’s little finger, and an ‘article’ (as the one you are reading) means a small scam whose aim is to deceive the reader” (Flusser 2016: 191). The objects created in the process of design are artificial and at the same time they are a manifestation of the human activity of playing with nature. He claims: „Culture as a whole is a project whose aim is to deceive nature, outsmart it, and all that in culture is designed to artificially save us from our animal condition and turn us into free artists.” (Flusser 2016: 192).

Flusser proposes that recent design that projects various forms of cunning indicates our increasing mistrust of objects or gadgets that are overwhelming our imagination. Photography (especially its hardware dimension) is subject to the same principles of this cunning “design” as are other objects around us (e.g. plastic pens described in the article). We let various “black boxes” make decisions for us not only because of their ability to produce images, but also because they fit so well to our hands and they are status symbols (such as the latest models of smartphones or exclusive reflex cameras). Are they not gadgets in the context of photography discussed here? Like other objects, although they contribute to the expansion of functionality and beauty, they do not increase value, but make “the whole culture a collection of unimportant gadgets” (Flusser 2016: 193).

The digression about design allows me to better explain the meaning of Piotr Wolyński's work entitled *Eye to Eye*. If we decide that the aim of intermedia photography is to reflect on the meanings and relations produced by media, this image can be treated as a commentary on the situation of the subject-creator of the photograph and the object-machine



Piotr Wolyński, *Eye to Eye / W cztery oczy*, 2009, courtesy of the artist

taking it. The work involves several stages: in the first, the spectator-participant-creator sits in front of two cameras watching two images of him-/herself at the same time. He or she can decide on the self-portrait to be created as a result of the overlap between the images from each camera. Next, the portraits are printed and hung in the gallery space next to the photographs documenting the self-portrait device itself. However, these images have a special feature: the cameras, fitted with spotlights, look like eyes (or perhaps antennae) of a machine whose task is to observe a human being.

The project raises important issues. Who is the author of the work? Wolyński, who designed the situation, the viewer, who assumes the role of an artistic participant in the event and co-creator of the image, or maybe finally a machine, which physically made the image? The photographs are taken by participants in a performance designed by the photographer (after all, participation in the exhibition does take on the character of a performance). They are taken automatically by the operation of the device, but a person can influence it and can play with the machine. However, in case of an error, who will take responsibility for the operation of the machines? A programmer? Or will he prefer to put the blame on the “system error”? Flusser, as well as the artist, aptly points to the problems that may arise in the course of playing with the program and questions the ethics of certain projects. In the second photograph, on the white surface of the fabric covering the words, we see a red patch, which can be associated with a spilled liquid or blood. However, we do not know whether blood spilled is that of a machine or a human being?

While Flusser sees in the play with the machine the possibility of exceeding its rules and opening a place for creation, Wojciech Chyła does not show similar optimism. Chyła does not believe that there is room for individual freedom in the technological game, because the machine always wins in the race to homogenize attitudes and behaviours. Chyła writes: “According to Vilém Flusser, designers of technical creation act in the belief that “camera programs allow them to introduce human unexpected elements” because “forcing a camera to produce an informative image that is not included in its program” is, according to him, the correct definition of technical creation” (Chyła 2012: 157).

There can be only an illusion of creation under these circumstances, because every human movement against the camera program is immediately intercepted by the system and becomes a part of it. The “totalitarianism of apparatuses” and their programs cannot be eluded.



Stefan Wojnecki, *Bezier Curves / Krzywe Beziera*, 2004, courtesy of the artist

However, photographers have more faith in the freedom of an individual, as shown in Wojnecki's series entitled *Network Societies*. (2010). The artist calls these images photographs, in keeping with what he called “augmented photography”, but basically we would call them images generated by a CGI computer. The series was realized with the use of programs to create vector graphics<sup>6</sup>. Its subject is the problem of preserving creative freedom in a world dominated by technology. In the series, Wojnecki uses visual technologies in two ways: in the first case (an example is the work *Bézier Curves*, 2004), the program generates curves from the given points on the plane, which are then developed by the artist. In the second case, the images entered by the author into the program (i.e. thermal photography, in other words, infrared photography, which records infrared radiation obtained from a thermal source and “Kirlian photography”, i.e. registration of electric discharges) are outlined and then the contour is ‘fed’ to the computer for further operations. The machine processes the data that has been entered, creating an effect that is only partially predictable. Wojnecki emphasizes the importance of conducting a “dialogue” with the machine, so that human imagination can remain free from the standard program of the machine. One may wonder to what extent *Network Societies* are really dialogues. After all, it is the creator who programs the action. Can the machine ‘answer’ differently from the program? Or is there anything else at stake here? It is about concretizing ideas of the world that go far beyond the imagination based on analogue perception. Wojnecki wrote in the commentary to his works: “Contemporary technology makes it possible to combine the visible with the invisible, and ‘augmented’ photography can generate futuristic images of the world” (Wojnecki 2010: online). It is therefore getting as close as possible to the state Müller-Pohle called a ‘projection’ state, when photography ceases to be “a thread of light” and changes into “a beam directed into the darkness”, whose pulse affords an endless holographic world” (Müller-Pohle 1991: online).

## Photograph as a philosophic gesture

„ Thanks to culture, a human being has increased the degree of freedom in decision making. By ceasing to be a man-object and becoming a man-subject, he achieves the next, higher degree of freedom.” (Wojnecki 2007: 193).

So far we have considered two basic aspects of Flusser’s theory which are reflected in the practice of intermedia photography. These were the concept of a technical image, based on a point structure, and the relation between a machine and the person programming it. The culmination

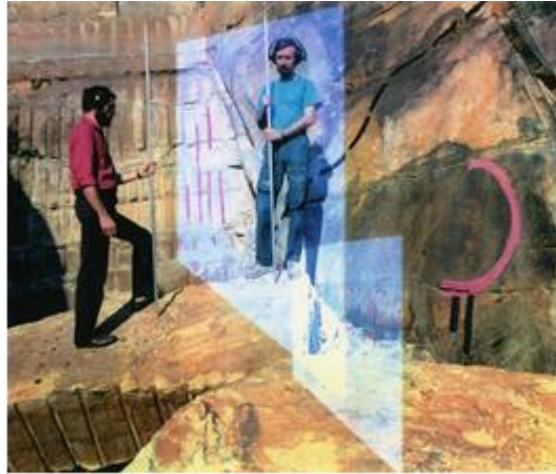
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<sup>6</sup> These are programs enabling the creation and processing of illustrations, especially for printing posters, folders, simple publications, the most popular and appreciated include CorelDRAW and Adobe Illustrator.

of both is to endow a gesture of photographing with some meaning, as a basic activity mediating between man and the world.

In his essay “Gestures. The Phenomenological Study” Flusser writes that gesture is the basis of human communication with the world around us (Flusser 2015: online). By stretching out our hands, we can touch objects and make contact with others. Every activity that we perform requires a specific gesture. This is particularly important in creative activities, such as designing, filming or photographing, because thanks to gestures we can also claim the right to self-determination and find a way to be-in-the-world. (Flusser 2018: 41). Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska stressed the importance of the theory of gesture as a bridge between the work of a philosopher and an artist. She wrote that the work of both creators requires numerous gestures. Of course, one can say that a photographer makes physical gestures, because the use of a camera requires movements such as lifting the device, directing towards the photographed world, as well as a physical gesture of straightening out, leaning, bending of the knees, etc. What is more important here, however, is the mental gesture so to say, i.e. the result of the “complicated, multi-level dialectic between intention and situation” so as to choose the perspective that will allow the thinking photographer and philosopher to express their intentions (Zeidler-Janiszewska 1999: 15). Therefore, it is about viewing the object again and again, about sustaining intellectual effort. Most often small gestures are made, small modifications (I would compare this to a shift in depth of focus) to highlight the senses that are most important in a given context. This does not mean fragmentation of thinking but, on the contrary, the perception of new aspects of the problem that have not yet been taken into account. It was Zeidler-Janiszewska who aptly found those elements of Wojnecki's artistic practice which bring him closer to Flusser's reflections. When commenting on his work, she wrote: “I think that similar intuitions [that photography is a kind of philosophy, note M.M.] also inspired Stefan Wojnecki, when he called for empowerment, for the humanistic factor to be taken into account in photographic practice. One can say about photography that it is a certain search for a perspective related to oneself, that it is manipulation of the situation, but also that it is a manipulation of oneself in this situation and that it is the specificity of the search that determines what can be called individuality, the style behind which a profound subjectivity conceals itself” (Zeidler-Janiszewska 1999: 17).

In series of works entitled *Reflexive Staging* (1987-1989), we see people performing various activities. For example in one of the photographs two partly naked human figures tied with a red rope walk into a lake (*Entering*). In another they stand on the shore with their eyes covered (*Future*). Wojnecki does not provide any additional commentary on their symbolic gestures, leaving the viewers some room for a free play of associations, for their own interpretation.



Stefan Wojnecki, *Antennas/Anteny*, from the cycle *Reflexive Staging/Inszenizacje refleksyjne*, 1987-1989, courtesy of the artist

In one of the works from the series entitled *Antennas* can see two men with headphones on their ears and poles in their hands. They are standing on rocks. One of them is illuminated by geometrical reflections of light. The work is a photomontage combining a staging in a quarry with graphic elements added under the enlarger. What do the gestures of the figures in the picture mean? They look as if they were trying to make contact with others. This interpretation is also implied in the title. However, the most interesting thing here is gesture, which refers both to the arrangements of the persons posing for the photo and the one that led Wojnecki to build a visual metaphor for an attempt to make contact. Zeidler-Janiszewska wrote: “Greeks used to say that theory starts with watching – philosophizing is watching. The viewers appear here as selectors, or creators of a certain theoretical concept as it is this concept that is the result of both actions. And this concept is in both cases a model and not a representation of the world” (Zeidler-Janiszewska 1999: 15).

Wojnecki is providing models for thinking, that is, exactly as Flusser assumed. The reality mediated by devices has a cultural dimension. The gesture of thinking reveals this mediation, making it possible to act in defence of humanism and human freedom. We are constantly struggling with systems that we have created ourselves and which we are now trying to elude. The meeting of Flusser’s theory and photographic practice brings surprising results both in thinking and in the artistic dimension, the former and the latter are illuminated by each other. It is important for Wojnecki not to treat photography as a set of ready-made solutions or easily applicable schemes. That is why each of his works is an experiment, both in the technical as well as in mental sense, just as each of Flusser’s small essays is a re-examination of a fragment of reality. In this sense, I might as well refer to Flusser’s texts as photographs and to Wojnecki’s photographs as philosophical attempts (or essays). Both the philosopher and the photographer



propose a reflection that, in a way, goes “against” technological facilitations through which specialists, i.e. creators of systems, want to grasp others.

### **Conclusion: inter- post-media philosophy**

Adam Mazur, a photography theoretician, observed a clear decline in interest in intermedia photography at the end of the twentieth century (Mazur 2012: 9). Mazur, curator of group exhibitions of recent Polish photography (“The New Documentalists”<sup>7</sup> and “The Red Eye Effect” at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art) explained the exhaustion of the creative potential of this trend as a generational change. A new group of artists interested in social problems (Wojciech Wilczyk, Konrad Pustoła, Zuza Krajewska, among others) appeared on the stage of Polish photography at the time. They chose the language of documentary image rather than self-thematic analyses of the language of the medium. Indeed, contrary to the visual transformation practices of the older generation, the “new” artists focused on documenting social, economic and identity problems. However, what was called intermedia photography in the twentieth century has survived under a different name. I am thinking here of post-media and post-digital trends (Wójtowicz 2016). In 2001, Leo Manovich's text entitled “Post-media aesthetics” was published. The media theoretician decided that in light of the dominance of digital media and “post-digital”, “post-net culture”, it is necessary to rethink the categorization of media, as well as to broaden the role of the artist. Therefore, Eisenstein would turn, from a “modernist filmmaker,” into an “information designer” and the role of post-media aesthetics would be to describe how “how a cultural object organizes data and structures users’ experience of this data” (Manovich 2001). Manovich, like Flusser, is interested in how programs shape the communication process, influencing both the transmitting and receiving factor in cultural communication. Let us examine the latest work that could help us understand the phenomena described in the article.



Agnieszka Antkowiak, *The Past Cannot Serve As Future Anymore*, performance 2018, performer Sonia Borkowicz, courtesy of the artist

<sup>7</sup> Original spelling, after the title of the exhibition catalogue (Mazur 2006).

Agnieszka Antkowiak presented a performance called *The Past Cannot Serve As Future Anymore*, during which the actress wanders between the guests at the exhibition with a camera on a selfie stick. She makes various gestures and strikes poses: her body is twisted so that the image in the camera will show her in an extraordinary state; outside the context of photography, her behaviour may seem bizarre. By asking about the extent to which technology shapes our bodies, Antkowiak seems to return to reflections on Flusser's gesture. At the same time her performance could undoubtedly be called post-media, using Manovich's definition (we have here both the aspect of cultural communication, as well as technology).

In fact, however, Antkowiak's activity continues the traditions of media creativity that we already know. There are both echoes of neo-avant-garde conceptualism of intermedia expanded photography and reflections on the post-media state of art, resound here. Photography is not only physically expanded to the other disciplines of art but also augmented to the new dimensions of digital world. The same problem that Flusser referred to remains at the centre: we live in the post-historic world, mainly because since we cannot project the past into the future. We cannot plan the future either. We live in the state of the eternal present. Perhaps the terms by which we try to organize the world of art have changed, but the artists' tasks have not changed: they have to go beyond the system, to address issues of the possibilities of technology invented by us.

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