

Introduction I

With a Unique Gesture of Philosophizing: Vilém Flusser (1920-1991)

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The following selection of texts¹ tries both to present Flusser's thinking and writing on art and to give an overview of the most important methodological and historical concepts characteristic for the broad variety of topics Flusser worked on.

Even if Flusser is continuously pointing out the importance of "epoche"² for philosophical thinking in general and is also practicing to obtain a position of distanced observation for himself, he does this only to get back to engaged writing, lecturing and teaching. As if methodologically repeating the horrifying experiences of his young life, when emigration and the loss of his entire family pulled him away from emotional attachments and threw him into "groundlessness" until he activated his political engagement as philosophical writer in São Paulo³, Flusser unifies abstract analytical thinking with the concrete requirements of everyday life.

"A new imagination" is what Flusser, after all, hoped for. This essay introduces Flusser's conception of anthropological and technological development and describes the difference between traditional images – showing objects on two-dimensional surfaces – and technical images – computations of concepts.

Siegfried Zielinski's lecture on "Flusser's media philosophy" provides not only an explanation of these conceptions and an analysis of his methods in general but also contextualizes Flusser's importance for theorists and activists of (new) media and (new) media arts.

"Art and Politics" presents two different models of art. Flusser often uses models based on etymological or historical analysis and presents them in dialectical opposition.

The essays on Nancy Burson and Andreas Mueller-Pohle are examples of applied theory.

"Exile and Creativity" is – apart from geographic phenomena – pleading for a voluntary search for the improbable: leaving the habitual (e. g. subject position) in order to be able to realize or even create the formerly unperceivable⁴. This essay underlines Flusser's idea of "project" as a possibility to grow out of subjectedness.⁵

With his work on gestures, starting already in the midseventies, Flusser is attempting to step back from the proclaimed ongoing process of abstraction by concentrating his own philosophical work on the concreteness of the body and his movements, which have always been connected to mediation and abstractness.⁶ Flusser is again and again creating a „point of

return“, he is inventing model after model to accomplish areas of contact (interfaces) between the abstract and the concrete, science and humanities – never without an ethic dimension.⁷ The creation of „Vampyroteuthis infernalis“⁸ and his essays on a different „dermatology“ are only but outstanding examples of what is characteristic for his work, reaching from extensions of science to excursions into fiction.

The selection of videoclips emphasizes moments of intervening thinking and boils down to the simple recognition, that dialogue is based on the acknowledgement of the other, not only due to the responsibility for the other/ neighbour but also the becoming aware of the limits of one's own competence.

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² The influence of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology is relevant throughout Flusser's work.

³ Cp. Vilém Flusser, *Bodenlos. Eine philosophische Biographie*. Mannheim: Bollmann, 1992 ⁴ Cp. Vilém Flusser, „Habit: The True Aesthetic Criterion“, in: Andreas Ströhl (ed.), *Writings*. Minneapolis/ London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 42-50.

⁵ Cp. Vilém Flusser, *Vom Subjekt zum Projekt. Menschwerdung*. Bensheim and Düsseldorf: Bollmann, 1994.

⁶ Cp. also André Leroui-Gourhan, *Le Geste et la Parole*. Paris: Albin Michelle, 1964, also published in English as *Gesture and Speech* and works of Teilhard de Chardin.

⁷ Cp. Dietmar Kamper, *Körper-Abstraktionen. Das anthropologische Viereck von Raum, Fläche, Linie und Punkt*. Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1999, here p.23.

⁸ Vilém Flusser and Louis Bec, *Vampyroteuthis infernalis: Eine Abhandlung samt Befund des Institut Scientifique de Recherche Paranaturaliste*. Göttingen: Immatrix Publications, 1987.