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The Disturbing Strangeness of the New: Vilém Flusser's Vision of Brazil

Is Flusser's *Phenomenology of the Brazilian* a Brazilian utopia or does it contain just the depiction of an alienated underdeveloped country? The article tries to demonstrate that it is neither. Surely, there is a utopian tradition to "thinking" Brazil. Right from its "discovery," Brazil was a utopia. In some way, even the utopian genre as such is Brazilian, as *Utopia* (1516) was (vaguely) written within the context of the debate over the "discovery" of Brazil. But, of course, a utopia is not about the other but about the self. Nevertheless, Brazil also inaugurated a rather distinct tradition of discourse: the discourse about the New. Brazil, in the sixteenth century, was the "New World" (Vespucci). The idea of a "New World" requires a conceptual revolution as it necessarily alters what was the world before: one's own world ages. Flusser continues this tradition. He thinks Brazil neither as a better nor as a worse complement to the European self but as something which, from a European/"occidental" point of view, is unimaginable, absurd, even abject. His book is about the strangeness of Brazil and its disproportionate difference. To think the New is almost impossible (and, occasionally, Flusser cannot avoid slipping into the utopian trap). It seeks to overcome the categories of thinking of the self as it emerges, however, the self can only find absence and even perversion of meaning. So, to the "occidental" eye, and as an underdeveloped country, Brazil appears principally as a country of alienation. This means that the Brazilians degenerated from the human way of being perceived as "true" to the "occidental" eye. Now, Flusser asks: what is the true human way of being? It is teleological concept. The Brazilians never had a "true" being to lose. The concepts of alienation and underdevelopment, therefore, are not only inappropriate for "thinking" Brazil, they hinder the conception of the profound alterity of the country. What is unthinkable and inadmissible for these categories is the place of the New. The New, in conclusion, only appears if the self changes and becomes other. In this sense, to think the New which Brazil represents means to become *Brazilian*, which is what happens with the narrator-immigrant of the book.

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