

Introduction

The fourth issue of Flusser Studies continues along the lines of the first two, offering two previously unpublished texts by Flusser himself on the cultural value and evaluation of bathrooms; two scholarly essays on his theories of (techno)images; as well as a series of texts by Louis Bec dedicated to Flusser's work and life together with some of Bec's imaginative paranaturalistic pictorial work inspired by his collaboration with Flusser.

Flusser's essay "Baths," which is published along with a Portuguese version that is reproduced here in its original format, focuses – somewhat tongue in cheek – on the multiple aspects of cleanliness and analyzes its ramifications in the moral, political and existential understanding of human (im)purity. Flusser connects the Watergate scandal, for example, with ecological arguments, political purges in formerly Communist Eastern Europe, and our daily bathing and shaving routines. The texts belong to a particular section of Flusser's work: his meticulous phenomenological descriptions of everyday objects, places and experiences. Most probably they were written jointly, articulating Flusser's habitual writing strategy in the early or the mid-seventies. And the reference to the Watergate scandal, which began in June 1972, dates the two pieces fairly accurately. The Portuguese version, furthermore, manifests his strategy of continuously reworking his texts in new linguistic versions. A later variant and development of some of the ideas expressed here was published in the book *Gesten* (1991) with the title "Die Geste des Rasierens," providing evidence of Flusser's life-long interest in this specific subject matter and gesture (and in the necessity of its perpetual performance).

The three texts by Louis Bec are of particular interest in this issue, not only because we publish them in their original French, but also because they bring together a series of pivotal aspects of Flusser's work that tie in with the other parts of this issue: the gestual side of bathing and shaving and the ambivalent and deceptive status of technoimages. In "Vilém Flusser 1920 / 1991" as well as in "Vampyrotheutis infernalis. Postscriptum" Bec tells the story of his friendship with Flusser, their conversations, travels and joint ventures that lead, among other things, to the publication of *Vampyrotheutis infernalis* in 1987.

The third text, "Les gestes prolongés. Postface," is a slightly different version of another text published in 1999 at the end of the French edition of Flusser's *Les Gestes*¹. Here, we are offered a precise description of the meaning and ambiguous ontological status of the subsequent images. Bec's floating oceaning wonders, their brilliant coloring and fascinating shapes present to the eye what Flusser's text presents to the ear: "Il apparaît que le Vampyrotheutis Infernalis comme tous

¹ Vilém Flusser, *Les gestes*, D'Arts éditeur, Cergy 1999, p.197-211.

les autres Vampyromorpha d'ailleurs, est une chimérisation émergeant des dessous troublants de l'amitié. Qu'il est la concrétion céphalopodique d'un dialogue. Qu'il est une chimérisation, non de l'assemblage ou du collage occasionnel, mais d'un bien curieux clonage."² This difference between 'collage' and 'clonage' can also be found in one of Flusser's essay on photography. Commenting upon the work of Nancy Burson in 1987 – the year *Vampyrotenthis infernalis* was published –, he writes: “ ‘Chimäre’ ist ein altes Wort und meint ein zusammengesetztes Fabeltier: eine Ziege mit Löwenkopf und Schlangenschweif. Man könnte also glauben, dass bereits die mythischen Alten kalkulierten und komputierten. Das wäre ein Irrtum. Die mythische Chimäre war eine Collage, ein Flickzeug. Hätte der sie heldisch bekämpfende Bellerophon ihr einen Tritt gegeben [...], der Löwenkopf wäre auf die eine Seite, die Schlangenschweife auf die andere gekollert. Das ist bei den eben emportauchenden ‘echten’ Chimären ganz anders. Man kann den grossen Bruder Bursons kicken, solange man will, er wird nie in Hitler, Mussolini und so weiter auseinanderfallen. Nimmt man ein ‘Geep’ (eine Chimäre aus Ziege und Schaf) und kickt es, es wird bestenfalls meckern. Die neuen ‘echten’ Chimären sind in sich geschlossene, eigenständige Phänomene. [...] Die neue chimärische Denkart äussert sich vor allem in zwei Tendenzen: ‘telematisch’ und ‘biotechnisch’ Die eine zersetzt die Welt in Informationsteilchen (‘Bits’), um daraus neue, chimärische Informationen zu komputieren. Die andere zersetzt die Lebewesen in Informationsteilchen (‘Gene’), um daraus neue chimärische Lebewesen zu komputieren. Bursons Bilder sind Beispiele für die erste Tendenz, das ‘Geep’ für die zweite.”³ Burson's ‘Warhead I’ (1982), for instance, consists of “55% Reagan, 45% Brezhnev, less than 1% each of Thatcher, Mitterand and Deng [...] In this composite portrait of world leaders, each subject, is weighted according to the size of the nuclear arsenal of their country.”⁴ Burson's, Bec's and Flusser's view of computational photography is remindful of another artist whose work has already been published in our journal: Michael Najjar.⁵

In his essay Deception and the “Magic” of “Technical Images” according to Flusser” Alberto J. L. Carrillo Canán considers Flusser's theory of communication and the meaning of technoimages within the context of a general theory of deception generated by different communication codes. He links several of Flusser's central essays with each other to uncover Flusser's simultaneous distrust of and fascination with technoimagery.

Matthew Fuller's essay “The Camera That Ate Itself” constitutes the second chapter of his 2005 book, *Media Ecologies*, reprinted here with permission from the MIT Press (Leonardo Book

² L. Bec, Vilém Flusser 1920 / 1991, p. 10.

³ V. Flusser, ‘Nancy Burson: Chimären 1987’, in: V. Flusser, Standpunkte, Göttingen 1989, p.146-7.

⁴ <http://www.nyu.edu/greyart/exhibits/burson/images/photos1/index.html>.

⁵ Compare <http://www.flusserstudies.net/pag/archive01.htm>

series).⁶ The text sets out with a description of the camera as an ‘apparatus’ as Flusser proposed it, most prominently in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983). In working with John Hilliard’s photograph *A Camera Recording Its Own Condition (7 apertures, 10 speeds, 2 mirrors)*, the author addresses certain developments of ‘apparatus’ and relates the concept to Marxist theories of the machinic, to conceptual art’s exploration of the materiality of informational systems, as well as to Foucault’s Nietzschean theories of knowledge.

We apologize to those readers of *Flusser Studies* who have been awaiting the publication of the special Czech issue. We decided to postpone the announced issue; it will be available after the Prague symposium to be held from the 12th to the 14th of November 2007.

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⁶ Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies. Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press 2005, p. 55-84..