Flusser Studies 10: Special Double Issue

Photography, Cinema, the Technical Image, and Vilém Flusser

Introduction

The 10th issue of *Flusser Studies* is dedicated to the theoretical and cultural relevance of Flusser's writings on photography within today's discussions on media, medialization, and photography and, in a much broader sense, to Flusser's concept of the (technical) image. The purpose of this special double issue is to celebrate 5 years of *Flusser Studies* and Flusser's 90th birthday simultaneously - occasions that also mark a much-widened reception of Flusser's works in numerous countries, especially Brazil, Germany, and the United States. Editoria AnnaBlume in São Paulo just published a special 5-volume box with some of Flusser's most significant books, including his autobiography, the *History of the Devil*, *Writing* and *Into the Universe of Technical Images*; in Germany, Flusser is beginning to interest a younger generation of artists and emerging scholars, based on increasing amounts of studies at the M.A. and Ph.D. level; and in the United States, the University of Minnesota Press is presenting three books both by and on Flusser in its Spring 2011 program: two translations by Nancy Roth, *Does Writing have a Future?* and *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, and the expanded introduction to Flusser, already available in Portuguese and German, *Vilém Flusser: An Introduction*, co-authored by the editorial team of *Flusser Studies*.

It is, furthermore and beginning with this issue, our intent to widen the scope of *Flusser Studies* in order to include a range of topics and theories that are related to Flusser's philosophy but that have not always been treated in depth within his work. Flusser did consider himself, first and foremost, a philosopher of many different topics; unsurprisingly, Flusser's texts have therefore appealed and will continue to appeal to a growing number of readers whose interests emerge from many fields, including, but not limited to, philosophy. In the following issues, then, we are interested in calling attention to ongoing questions in the areas and fields Flusser engaged with. We are not exclusively seeking to highlight Flusser's participation in or contribution to those areas or fields; rather, we would like to showcase the areas and fields as such, making them part of the debate and exchange in *Flusser Studies*. Below, we refer to just a few of them in order to tie Flusser's œuvre into established, current, and emerging discussions within and beyond academia. Readers and potential authors should consider this slight change of direction, taken by

the editors of the journal, as an invitation to submit work on and within these areas and fields and suggest topics and discussions to the editorial team (by e-mail or via our new listserv).

First and foremost, at the beginning of the 21st century, Flusser no longer just speaks to those euphoric about new media and possible virtual realities, so dominant in media theory in the early and mid-90s. With his interconnected ideas about the archive, storage and distribution of information, memory, communication, and dialogue, Flusser today addresses just as much the scholar of digital culture or media anthropology and archeology, the librarian intrigued by new methodologies and technologies in the digital humanities or the general reader trying to keep pace with everyday technical tools, working to understand how we interact with them and how they may influence or change us. The reemerging interest in phenomenology and with many other interdisciplinary studies that employ a phenomenological approach, places Flusser within an important lineage of practicing phenomenologists in the 20th century, among them not just Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, but also Gustav Shpet and Jan Patočka. Flusser's focus in *Gestures*, in his texts on language and communication and in his considerations of art, science, and creativity, is nourished by his interest in Husserl, certainly one of his major influences.

Readers engaged in animal studies, too, may find Flusser's work of interest, certainly his fable about the *Vampyrotheutis*, as he scrutinizes therein what Matthew Calarco has called "the metaphysics of subjectivity": "The subject is not just the fundamentum inconcussum of modernity but is the avowedly human locus of this foundation--and this point needs to be explicitly recognized and contested as such."[1] Flusser would agree. His case study in marine and cephalopods' adventures would consequently also fit well into the catalog of *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human*, discussed by Kelly Oliver, and adds to the pedagogies of Rousseau, Derrida, De Beauvoir, Lacan, and Agamben, among others.[2] More significantly, perhaps, studies of the posthuman, including the latest thread of discussions initiated by Katherine Hayles in 1999, may integrate Flusser's work on apparatuses, the technical image, codes, communication, and, most importantly, on the human as project in *From Subject to Project*, a negative anthropology.[3]

Migration studies and inter- or trans-cultural studies present another set of interdisciplinary fields where Flusser's work, significantly his collection on *The Freedom of the Migrant: Objections to Nationalism* and his writings on language and on nomadism, open new venues for debate. In his essay "The Challenge of the Migrant," for example, he sets out to view migration and loss of one's homeland from a unique perspective: "Homeland is not an eternal value, but rather a

[1] Matthew Calarco, Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 10.
[2] Kelly Oliver, Animal Lessons: How They Teach us to be Human (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
[3] Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). See also Cary Wolfe, What is Posthumanism? (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

function of a specific technology; still, whoever loses it suffers. This is because we are attached to heimat by many bonds, most of which are hidden and not accessible to consciousness. Whenever these attachments tear or are torn asunder, the individual experiences this painfully, almost as a surgical invasion of his most intimate person. When I was forced to leave Prague (or got up the courage to flee) I felt that the universe was crumbling. I fell into the error of confusing my private self with the outside world. It was only after I realized, painfully, that these now severed attachments had bound me that I was overcome by that strange dizziness of liberation and freedom, which everywhere characterizes the free spirit. I first experienced this sense of freedom in London, in that country that strikes many continentals as almost Chinese, at the beginning of the war, during a time of foreboding about the coming human horror in the camps. The transformation of the question 'Free from what?' to 'Free for what? – an inversion that is characteristic of freedom gained--has since accompanied me like a basso continuo on my migrations. All of us nomads who have emerged from it share in the collapse of settledness.[4] Flusser's objections to nationalism here do not originate from a political or post- or supra-national position; the "collapse of settledness" describes both a physical and intellectual necessity and the preparedness to acknowledge encrusted forms of existence in order to break through them and leave them behind. Cutting the knots metaphorically, as painful as that may be, allows for exploration in new fields of thought and action, a kind of process model against stagnation and lethargy: "Patriotism is symptomatic of a diseased aesthetic. . . A home is the foundation of all consciousness because it permits us to perceive the world. But dwelling is also anesthetizing because it itself is not perceived but only dimly sensed. This internal contradiction becomes even clearer when one confuses dwelling with heimat and the primary with the secondary. Because the settled person is so enmeshed in his heimat it requires a conscious effort to perceive the world out there."[5] Additional topics include: multilingualism, translation, inter-disciplinarity, history, and visual studies.

To allow a dialogue among those interested in the work of Vilém Flusser and in the topics that interested him we have also started a mailing list:

(http://mailman.ti-edu.ch/mailman/listinfo/flusserstudies)

All readers should feel free to subscribe, tell their colleagues, and help us create a lively community around this thriving journal.

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[4] Vilém Flusser, The Freedom of the Migrant: Objections to Nationalism, ed. Anke Finger and trans. Kenneth Kronenberg (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 3-4.
[5] Ibidem, p. 14.

Lastly, we have also initiated a book review page, administered by Michael Hanke (michaelhankebeaga@yahoo.com.br), where most recent publications on Flusser and related books of interest will be discussed for our readers' convenience.

About this Issue

As in previous issues, FS10 includes a series of yet unpublished texts by Vilém Flusser, in this case four lectures on photography, in French, and an English translations of the first three lectures by the author. The lectures were held by Flusser in the spring of 1984 at the Ecole nationale de la photographie in Arles (France), and they summarize the main points of Flusser's *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, first published in a German version in 1983. The essay "*?*," on the other hand, is a semiotic and existential reflection on the status of signs in general, but also on language.

Andreas Müller-Pohle is a key figure in the editorial history of Vilém Flusser's work, especially in the early propagation of seminal texts like *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, *Into the Universe of Technical Images, Does Writing Have a Future?* and *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*. Flusser also published regularly and for nearly a decade critical texts on photography in Müller-Pohle's journal *European Photography*. Flusser and Müller-Pohle also collaborated directly in a creative exchange between text and image as the text *Transformance*, written in the early 1980s, and the photographic work that inspired it show.

Another very telling example, this time of Flusser's influence on the work of contemporary photographers, is Aditya Mandayam's pictures that we included in this issue, along with his artistic statement. Mandayam's pictures which he calls *laptopograms* are images made by pressing photosensitive paper onto a laptop screen and flashing an image in a manner not unlike contact printing or photograms.

Photography and Beyond contains a series of reflections on the aftermath of Vilém Flusser's *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* by Mark Amerika, John Goto, Andreas Müller-Pohle, Michael Najjar, Simone Osthoff, Nancy Roth, Bernd-Alexander Stiegler, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Siegfried Zielinski.

Lambert Wiesings "Photography as a phenomenological act: on Vilém Flusser's reception of Edmund Husserl" explores Vilém Flusser's phenomenological approach in relation to the work of Edmund Husserl by analysing his phenomenological conception of the photographic act.

Flusser, in fact, not only defines his theoretical work as phenomenology, he considers the act of photography itself a phenomenological act.

Florian Arndtz's paper, "Writing about photography. Vilém Flusser, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida," explores how concepts of writing and the technical image are related in the works of Vilém Flusser, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida.

Claudia Becker ("Thinking – Images. About the necessity of a philosophy of photography") examines the necessity for a philosophy of photography as Flusser proposed it in the 1980s, correlating such philosophy with that of other famous thinkers and philosophers.

Dirk-Michael Hennrich's "For a Mythography of Photography," on the other hand, embarks on a dialogue with Flusser's *Philosophy of Photography*, considering myths not simply as a "primitive" state of thinking, but as the dark *residuum* of all kinds of modern experience. The mythical tale as a whole traces and illuminates the inner sense of and some main concepts of photography.

Katerina Krtilova's essay, "Vilém Flusser's Philosophy of Images: Towards a philosophy of the technical image focusing on photography," explores Flusser's philosophy as a field of intertwined 'layers' of argumentation that overlap in his search for a new philosophy. It corresponds with the new kind of images he proposes: a new philosophy in or through images.

Anke Finger, in "On Creativity: Blue Dogs with Red Spots," discusses Flusser's as yet unexplored concept of creativity and his idea of art-making. The short article is an excerpt from the last chapter of the forthcoming English-language introduction to Vilém Flusser, simply titled *Vilém Flusser: An Introduction*, co-authored with Rainer Guldin and Gustavo Bernardo. The book will be published by the University of Minnesota Press in 2011.

Erick Felinto's "Vampyroteuthis: The Second Nature of Cinema. The 'Matter' of Film and the Body of the Spectator" addresses mainly with Vilém Flusser's *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*, a text that reenacts the tradition of a mental experiment effacing the boundaries between man and animal. In this view, instead of being opposing poles, nature and culture become reflecting mirrors where man can acknowledge his ties to nature and the animal kingdom. More than just a rhetorical trope, the so-called *allegory of natural history* comprises what could be defined as a philosophy of animality, espoused by thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Gilbert Simondon and Jacques Derrida.

Rainer Guldin examines those Flusser texts on the cinema that draw a radical distinction between film-making and the structure of movie theaters in "'With scissors and glue': Reflections on Vilém Flusser's concept of cinematic technical imagination." According to Flusser, the cinema is far from having realized all its creative potential as a medium, and the very way films are consumed thwarts the revolutionary force hidden within the medium. To really appreciate its

force fully one would have to study the cinematic technical imagination and its ability to create a radically new vision of the world.

Starting out from Vilém Flusser's *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Martyna Markowska presents an innovative analysis of two Polish photographic novels in her "Flusser and the Polish (photography) novels." The essay explains why, how, and in which type of novels Flusser's theory is sustainable and relevant for intermedial analysis.

In "Kurtis's "vandalised" photographs: on the problem of technical images in post-documentary photography," finally, Agustin Bertí discusses possible theoretical convergences and divergences between Walter Benjamin's and Vilém Flusser's approach to technology, using the two theorists to interpret the work of the Argentinean photographer Seba Kurtis.

We would like to thank the University of Minnesota Press for permission to publish two paragraphs from the introduction and an excerpt from the last chapter featured in the book by Finger, Guldin, and Bernardo, *Vilém Flusser: An Introduction*, forthcoming in 2011.

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Lugano (CH) and Storrs (USA)

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