Baruch Gottlieb

Translations and Transcriptions from Bielicky's Recordings with Flusser in Summer 1991

This translation originated with an invitation from Monika Stepanova of the Czech Centre Berlin to have a public conversation with Bielicky in the series "Flusser Talks". In preparation for this, I remembered Bielicky had deposited the uncut material from that visit at the Vilém Flusser Archive. The intimacy of the recordings gives much insight into what it was like to be with Flusser. His omnivorous and insatiable intellect extends in all directions, probing, prodding, teasing his counterparts.

The upheaval following the collapse of the socialist governments of Eastern Europe was ominous for Flusser. As can be seen in the late interviews with Miklós Paternák[1], the insecurity of the time seems to have incited him to revisit the Talmudic studies of his youth in the light of his communicology[2], seeking Messianic redemption in the new computer-networked electronic communication forms.

A special treat in these recordings is a somewhat uncomfortable meeting with some television producers. During this meeting, Flusser describes his radical vision for a television program, which is outlined in his unpublished essay "Menschheitsgeschichte als Fernsehdrama" (Human History as Television Drama): a "colossal", "incredible" program, "can one imagine a more beautiful program than this one?" which would "use images in a just manner for the first time"[3]. Flusser avidly sought out, as evident in his collaborations with Fred Forest, Louis Bec, and Bernd Wingert, opportunities to apply his communicological insights to the production of technical images. A short excursus from the meeting with the producers[4] is presented here to provide an extra tiny taste of his enthusiasm. He was very disappointed when his interlocutors that afternoon were not in the position to help realize his magnificent revolutionary media project.

Thank yous are required for Lothar Hartmann who helped check the translations and Steffi

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[1] Interviews with Flusser from 1988 to 1991 published in the DVD "We Shall Survive in the Memory of Others" Walther König Verlag Berlin 2010

[2] Perhaps Flusser's most ambitious attempt to systematize his thinking appears in his Kommunikologie.(Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996)

[3] *Utiliser pour la premiere fois les images d'un façon juste !* – Flusser From the "Excursus from a meeting with television producers: On the invention of bronze" published here below.

[4] This excursus was excerpted from Steffi Winkler's transcript of Flusser's proposal for a television program "Human History as Television Drama" in this volume in order to keep their structure coherent with that in the typescript to which he is referring.

Winkler who helped in so many ways in the preparation for publication of this text. Also a great thank you to Michael Bielicky for his generous cooperation in the preparation of the transcriptions and translations in this volume, and finally, warm appreciation to Daniel Irrgang and Siegfried Zielinski of the Vilém Flusser Archive who work tirelessly to enliven and support the Flusserian community.

Excursus from a meeting with television producers: On the invention of bronze

In the Neolithic, you chipped away on stones in order to get ever finer tools. Then somewhere in Tripolia near the mouth of the Danube they found a curious stone which was in fact oxidized copper. They chipped away at this and they found copper. And they found that copper is a much better stone to work than any other stones. By accident, the copper got mixed with other elements like zinc, and bronze was invented by accident. Now what was the consequence of this? Bronze is of course much more efficient than a stone, but it is much more expensive. It is impossible for everybody to have bronze, previously everybody had stones. So a new caste [distinction] came about: the lords who had bronze and the slaves who used stones, and those lords became heroes. This is an heroic age, they fought each other with bronze swords and broad shields. And, by chance, the horse was introduced by the Hittites, and they sat on their horse. So now you had the following situation: you had the enormous mass of the people who continued to live in Neolithic times, working the earth with their stone implements, and a caste of robbers called heroes, kings, and so on, who fought with each other. And the Iliad, Troy, is the story of those bronze heroes. If you read the Iliad, you have no idea, because you only hear about the bronze features, you don't hear about the masses, and Schliemann[5]'s mistake was that he looked for bronze and he found stone. he dug too deep. The fascinating thing about Troy is: all our ideologies are bronze ideologies, for instance, the subjection of the woman, the degradation of the women is a consequence of bronze. War, trade as a form of war is a consequence of war and you can read it in the Iliad if you read it correctly, Schliemann had no idea. But we know, because we are absolutely different now from what we had 150 years ago. We know of the technique of bronze-making, We know of the intervention of the horse, and what it meant when you equip wheels with bronze knives – the murderous people! And this is an image! You got a Godsend, Sabine[6]! *it was sent by God! It was a miracle! She [Sabine] proposed something wonderful to me. To use images in a just manner for the first time!*

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[5] Heinrich Schliemann was a polyglot businessman and autodidact archaeologist renown for excavating the site of ancient Troy at Hissarlik. He wrote *"Troja und seine Ruinen "*(Troy and Its Ruins) in 1875
[6] Sabine Müller, technical director for Lichtblick productions.

Interviews with Bielicky

Michael Bielicky: "Has film, in the way we understand it currently, lost its meaning? According to your thesis 'All revolutions are technical revolutions' one might think that film has lost its effectiveness and its meaning. Must humanity now reorient itself with regard to the development of new media?"

Vilém Flusser: "You have correctly said that one of my hypotheses proposes that all revolutions are technical revolutions. But it is the intellectual's duty to revise his hypotheses with regard to the facts. And the current events in the Soviet Union cause me, among other things, to rethink my hypothesis, because apparently, what is going on in Russia is a revolution without being a technical one." (Bielicky 1994: 10:19-10:54)

Vilém Flusser: "I want to try to respond to your question now. If I compare film with the sequential audio-visual and speaking images... if I compare film for example with video, as it appears on TV but also how it works without TV, and on the other hand, if I compare film with a computer image, I would say that film has been superseded for two reasons, firstly for material, and secondly for communicological reasons. [...] The communication revolution consists in a switching over of information flows. Until now, when one wished to inform oneself, one had to go to the source of information. Today, information comes into the house. Cinema is a structure from before the communications revolution. In order to receive images, people have to go to the cinema. Video and television are a post-revolutionary switch. The images come into the house.

A material consideration: film, which is an extension of photography is a chemical, that is, a coarse-grained image. The grains are molecules. Video and computer images are electronic, that is, very fine-grained images. The grains are atomic particles. Therefore one must say, also from a material point of view, it is correct to claim that film has been superseded. But here arises another consideration, namely, a medium may be taken as *ad acta* once all of its possibilities have been exhausted. With regard to photography this has almost taken place. One can claim that practically all the possibilities slumbering inside the camera have been exploited. Perhaps the chemical photo really has been superseded.

But we cannot say this about the film camera, and for a strange reason: during its history, the film camera has been put into question first by theatre and later by television. Theatre makes a four-dimensional, scenic appearance, and television is the extension of mirrors and windows, while film, as a successor to photography, is a wall-image. The development of film was destroyed because, on one hand, it wanted to imitate theatre, and on the other hand, television imitated film.

As a result of this doubled-sided mangling, film never correctly completed its development. And I believe it can be seen in the experimental film being shot in Italy today that the possibilities of film have not yet been exhausted. So in this sense film has not been superseded.

But there is something else, precisely because film is seen as being obsolete, is it able to survive. Precisely because people are no longer used to going out of their houses to receive images, and 'in an old-fashioned manner' have to go to the cinema, perhaps that is precisely the attraction. Perhaps people enjoy going to the cinema because they can't receive the images as conveniently there as they do at home."

Michael Bielicky: "Central to Judaism are two elements: writing and light. Is writing losing its meaning? In the age of the 'flood of images', as you write in your articles, will [writing] increasingly be replaced with images?"

*Vilém Flusser: "*You say that for Judaism, script and light are central problems, and also images, central motives. But images also play an important role in Judaism, and I want to say a few words about that since the 'prohibition of images' is usually falsely interpreted. According to Judaism, there is only a single image of God: namely the human being. A human being is the image of God. I can see the countenance in the other – I can only see God in the face of the other. And the only way to God is through the other. The 'prohibition of images' states that I cannot see reality otherwise than in the face of the neighbour because every other image leads me away from the love of humanity and thereby from the love of God. This is important to note when it comes to how we look at the new images in light of Judaism. These new, technical images are not images of things but images of thoughts for example of equations. Therefore I believe that even the most orthodox rabbinical interpretation has no objections to synthetic images.

A second jewish remark: you say that script is a central theme of Judaism. I am not sure if what one calls *liktup* in Judaism means writing, exactly the same as what we mean by *scribere* and *graphein.* In any case, as you know, the name of God is writable but not speakable, since the name of God, namely *YHWH* is according to certain interpretations a portmanteau, and at the same time means 'was', 'is', and 'will be', is thus writable but unspeakable. This is a position with regard to writing which we do not know outside of Jewish sources. I don't want to talk about light because my Talmudic culture is not sufficient to speak about this theme from a jewish perspective." (Bielicky 1994: 11:10-14:04)

Vilém Flusser: "I would like to approach your question from another position, lets say from my communicological position which relates to the codification of the message. In some of my texts,

I have attempted to interpret how scripts are the unfurling of information contained in images, that scripts emerged when humanity began to count the contents of images. In other words, to make what is implicit in the image explicit. And that this unfurling of image-contents equates with rolling out one-dimensional lines from two dimensional images. I am of the opinion that the media are striking back on consciousness, and not in a mysterious way, but rather are striking back in the gesture of decoding. When I decipher an image, my eyes glide over the surface, this strikes back at my consciousness and my consciousness acquires a circular, magical character. If I decipher a text, my eyes glide linearly along the lines, this strikes back on my consciousness and it acquires a linear univocal, processual, historical structure. I am thus of the opinion that writing has produced the historical, linear consciousness. History does not begin with texts that capture the happenings, but the other way around, that things can only happen and can only reach consciousness as happenings because writing has been discovered. Writing is the cause of history.

We witness today a doubled transcoding of writing – on one hand, writing is recoded into images such as in the form of video which you are using right now, on the other hand, the image is recoded into numbers and these numbers can generate images,the so-called numerically generated images. If this is the case. if currently texts are grasped in a vise and twisted by numbers on one side and by images on the other, this means the end of historical consciousness and the replacement of the consciousness through a new one which we must, for lack of a positive expression, call posthistorical consciousness." (Bielicky 1994: 14:35-17:20)

Michael Bielicky: "In your texts you speak of a crisis of the alphabet. Does this mean that the symbols of the alphabet have been replaced with the symbols of images?"

Vilém Flusser: „First, I will speak very briefly about the symbols of the alphabet. The alphabet is a code that was created with the intention to make spoken languages visible. It is a transcoding from the auditory in the visual. In order to understand this intention, a preliminary remark s necessary. A human being is an animal that passes on inherited information against the laws of biology. This communication of acquired information is called culture. In order for it to be passed on, this information must be stored somewhere. In the pre-alphabetic tradition there were two forms of storage: namely air and hard objects.

When I speak, I transform airwaves into symbols. These are called *phonemes*. I pass this phonemically encoded information on to a receiver. This is called an oral culture. This is a very convenient method because the air lets itself be manipulated easily. But it is an unreliable method because the people can misunderstand the spoken language they hear from others. Otherwise, one can store acquired information in hard material. For example, I acquired the information 'to cut'

and I can carve the form of a knife out of some hard material. This is called material culture. This is a very long-term form of memory. There are stone knives which are 40.000 years old and they still cut. But it is a very form of culture which demands a lot of effort.

The alphabet is a wonderful invention. It preserves oral culture in material. One invents symbols for phonemes, these are carved into soft clay which is then baked. And in this way, libraries are created. And a library is, at the same time, an oral and a material culture. And one can say that the cultures which use alphabets live quite differently from all the others, because they have this advantage. But, as always happens, this invention has a side-effect which proved to be more important than its effective purpose. Namely, when I put spoken language down in writing, I change the language. Because for the first time I become aware of the implicit rules of the language in the process of writing it. I only really learn to speak properly when I write. What the children learn at school with reading and writing, is how to speak their own mother tongue correctly. This means, before the invention of the alphabet, nobody spoke correctly. The Greeks have a word for this, namely: *mythos*. Mythos means to speak with closed lips. People spoke and thought mythically. Since the alphabet, they learn to speak and think discursively and disciplined. The result of the alphabet was the obsolescence of myth. This made philosophy, science and technology possible in the first place. This is what I wanted to set out." (Bielicky 1994: 17:35-21:56)

Vilém Flusser: „Now lets look at the crisis of the alphabet. I don't think that images compete with the alphabet. Rather, there are two considerations. Firstly, the simple one: we have recently invented methods that preserve spoken language on solid material better than the alphabet can. For example, vinyl records, for example recording tape. These are colossal competition for the alphabet. Only when I speak onto a recording tape, I start speaking in an undisciplined manner again. This means, should the alphabet be replaced by records and tape, language will become feral.

And there is an even more important reason. The alphabet was never a pure code. Besides the symbols which represent phonemes, there have always been *ideograms* in the alphabet which represent quantities, namely numbers. That's why one should not speak of an alphabet but rather of an *alphanumeric* code. It has been demonstrated since about 500 years ago that numbers are better able to formulate natural science concepts than are letters. This is namely because the letters mean words in a spoken language, and words are inexactly defined terms. Meanwhile numbers mean quantities, and quantities are exactly defined terms. Therefore one can think more precisely and more distinctly with numbers than with letters. Thus the scientists and subsequently the elite have increasingly abandoned letters for numbers. Today we are ruled by an elite: Mathematicians, natural scientists, technicians, but also computer people since computer codes are derivatives of numeric codes, and these number codes are the true danger for the alphabet. Perceptions are expressed less

in letters and increasingly in numbers.

If you take into account, on one hand, how the information in the flood of images has come to be conveyed, on the other hand, the recording tapes and vinyl records, and on a third hand the number-code and its relation with the computer code, then you come to the conclusion that the alphabet's days are numbered. That what we call literature is reaching the end. And I would like to say another thing, that the alphabet was an extremely valuable code. It was a secret code. Only a few could write alphabetically, most were illiterate. And now, it is the other way around. The alphabet has become a common good and floods the area with print.

This is an inflationary depreciation because the numbers are hard to access and are ruled over by an elite. I believe we are confronting a situation which is similar to the invention of the alphabet. At that time, the people were ruled by literate people and were illiterate themselves. Now people are ruled by mathematicians and computer people they can't decipher and the alphabet can't help them. I think this is what I had to say." (Bielicky 1994: 21:57-25:50)

Vilém Flusser: "I am compelled, as an intellectual, out of honesty, to always reconfirm my hypotheses with respect to the facts. This is particularly odious at my age when I have spent decades developing my hypotheses. I have told you that it is my hypothesis that history, political conciousness is coming to an end because writing is in crisis. What is currently happening in the Soviet Union, is not well explainable through my hypothesis. I will have to rethink it. The viewer who is watching me now must forgive me if I take no definite point of view. I haven't had enough time to reflect theoretically upon the dramatic events."

Vilém Flusser: "You have offered me the opportunity, on this day, 28th of August 1991, to speak on the German television. And I wish to make the most of this occasion by reflecting on the optimism which in Germany and elsewhere has accompanied what has happened in the Soviet Union. From my point of view, which is above all the point of view of communication, these developments are extremely dramatic and dangerous. What had been attempted over 70 years in the Soviet Union was to replace the inherited traditional social structures with new, rational ones. For example, states, unions, people, family, perhaps even marriage are disencumbered of their sanctified associations, and more reasonable, more human structures are set up. This attempt is not historically unprecedented , it is not the first and will not be the last. Nevertheless, this is, in my opinion, the most important that has ever been attempted. The intention was to abolish the earlier ideologies which articulated themselves in structures such as marriage, class, state, people, or religion, namely because all of these structure, above all that of the nation, have devastating consequences. And the intention was to replace all these forms which were considered noxious with better ones. This

attempt has failed. It had already been put into question during the second decade of our century. It was proven to be contradictory in the 30s. The pact between the Soviet Union and the uninhibited nationalism of Naziism was the proof of this failure. And, in particular, the excesses of Stalinism continue be demonstrate since then, the fact that the experiment has suffered a shipwreck.

But what is happening today is far further-reaching. Today shows that all the outdated structures, in particular the national and religious ones, which had apparently been surpassed, have not passed away, and they rise again like the Phoenix out of the ashes. With all the gruesomeness that these structures have always had with them. This dragon's brood we had once believed we had succeeded in suppressing, lives again and threatens us anew. This terrible national prejudices, which are bound up with words like Lithuania and Moldavia, the repulsive bigotry which is contained in such things as the slavophile orthodoxy, all that, presumed dead, lives again and reappears with even greater power. This is catastrophic. Not mainly because the attempt to cause the state to 'wither away' through the [soviet, BG] councils has failed, but rather because trust has been disqualified from all future attempts to implement reasonable forms of society. How can we trust a European union which is nothing more than a superficial federation of nations, where the radical attempt to unify the councils, in other words to change the fundamental structures, has failed.

But I will go further. The hopes of many intellectuals including myself are bound up with the word *telematics*. The future telematic society will be a society where, thanks to formal thinking obsolesces ideologies, and thereby is capable, by connecting groups of human beings through their competences, to achieve a form of life worthy of humanity. Telematics seen in this way certainly has similarities with the structures of the [soviet, BG] council republics which have foundered. Of course - telematics is non-ideological and the council republics were based on a Marxist-Leninist Ideology. Of course - telematics is technically undermined while soviet republics were built on class conflict. Nevertheless, the similarities are too big not to see the collapse of the soviet union as a bad omen for the establishment of a new society. This is why I would like to offer a word of warning. I am just as relieved as you and the young generation in general that the horrible dictatorship which reigned for decades in Russia and the neighbouring lands has fallen. But I see with even greater horror a future where the murderous ideologies we thought were dead or defeated by the russian revolution have come back to life. This is what I wanted to say." (Bielicky 1994: 01:57-10:04)

History of Mankind as a Television Drama[7]

Vilém Flusser: „I imagined the first program as follows: How is it possible that there is a beast that can put its hand into the world, take something out of it and turn it against the world? How is such a gesture – how is man possible? How is the phenomenon man possible? How can there be an animal which is at the same time within the world and outside? That would be the first picture. It would be, it had to be probably a computer synthesised image.

And the second image is: How does one make out of a stone something to cut with? Not only how do you do it, but where does the idea come from that the world is not as it should be? That I can change the world? How do we, how does *Homo habilis*, even *Homo erectus robustus*, which is almost a beast – *Homo erectus robustus* is about 1,40m high, it's a little ape – how can such a beast have the idea that there is a reality and that there are values, and that you should realise values and evaluate reality? How can this come about? I would like to [show] the wonder of man, the incredible mystery with this little beast. And I will not even speak about the problem of coordination of the two halves of the brain. But the idea that you have two hands which can not overlap, you know, hands can only turn around in the fourth dimension. Have you ever thought about the two hands? Look at the two hands. How does this come about? Now, this would have to be an image of the hands and the stone within a hand.

The third part would concern: How do I imagine? How can I step back, look, have a vision of the world, which is necessarily subjective and necessarily fugitive. And how can I fix it on a wall? And how can I make it intersubjective? How can I transform what I see into symbols? […] For instance, the problem: We now know that we only see colours, we do not see shapes. We feel shapes, but we only see colours. You are not aware of this, because the man in Lascaux made a convention. He made a stroke and this meant the silhouette of a pony. Now, how did he do it? How did he make a convention? How could he say, now every time I do this *[painting a stroke into the air]* this will mean the silhouette of a pony. I would not like to diminish this mystery in all these things. How comes symbolisation about? How does imagination begin? That would be the third part of the first program. Each would be about 5 minutes.

And the last part would be: The image begins to live. It is so alive. You must imagine, you look

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[7] The following part of the transcript is based on excerpts from the original recordings: 02-1 00:41:40-01:01:00 and 03-1 00:00:00-00:16:08. These recordings relate to the contents of a still unpublished 5-page essay called "Human History as Television Drama" (VFA-document No.2463) which Flusser presents in English. This typescript has been published in the current Flusser Studies 17, May 2014, for the first time. According to current research, the participants in this recording are Vilém Flusser, Edith Flusser, Karin Lauerwald (assistant to Flusser), Sabine Müller (Assistant and director, Lichtblick Film, Cologne), Carl-Ludwig Rettinger (Producer, Lichtblick Film, Cologne), Louis Bec (artist and friend of Flusser's) and Michael Bielicky (artist).

at the pony, you look at the mammoth in Lascaux. And there is a flame, and it starts to live. It is more real than the real world outside. So how can I not be idolatrous? How can I not look at imagination as if it were real and [at] reality as if it were imagination? It's the same problem like dreams. Now I begin to live in a dream world. And within the dream world – this is *Homo sapiens sapiens* before the invention of writing – he lives in a dream world, in magic. Everything he walks in magic, everything he does is a magical gesture. That would be the fourth part of the first program. […]

Such a program would be something which has never been done. […] It would be very, very impressive. […] Because I took it from a completely different angle. I took it seriously. I took it honest. […] I thought it was to be an incredible program.

You have an image. In front of that image you have idolatrous people. And then there are some people who want to liberate us from idolatry. So they take out the elements of the picture, pixels, and they align them in order to show to the people that the image is man-made. And that if I make a linear codification of what is contained in the picture, I have counted and recounted the content of the picture. The pictures become transparent to the world, I have destroyed the hallucination. It becomes clear vision again. But as usual, whatever you do, something happens that you did not intend. People change. It's the most radical cultural revolution that you can imagine. Because as long as you had pictures your eye had to make circles on the surface of the image in order to decipher it. This is called in English, I believe, scanning. I have to scan a surface. Now if you do that, you travel from one element of the image to another, then you return. And this is your experience of the world: Everything is circular, and everything returns always. Everyday is followed by night, every night is followed by day, every summer is followed by winter, every winter is followed by summer. Everything returns. This eternal return that is the world image people, magicians live in.

By the moment you take the pixels out, you transform them into pictograms, and you align the pictograms. Your eye no longer does this *[making a circular motion with his arm]*, it has to follow the line. And if the eye follows the line nothing ever repeats itself. You have a different vision of time: Time is a tendency which goes from the past into the future without stopping in the present. Nothing is, everything becomes. Everything is a process, nothing ever can repeat itself. Every lost moment is an opportunity definitely lost. This dramatic terrible sense of becoming is historical consciousness. When you invent writing you have invented history. There could have been no history before writing because nothing could process itself. Everything merely happened. With the invention of writing, historical consciousness was invented, and historical consciousness invented history. Now you can imagine how I see this program. In what dramatic way this can be seen, when you show the circularity of the eye and then the linearity. When you can show to people what is

the difference between synchronicity and diachronicity. What it means to, what a world to tell, *conter, raconter*, what it means, what it is to tell a story. Because before the invention of writing no story could be told.

Now the third program: The purpose of the alphabet is to transcode a spoken language into visual signs. Now, this was achieved because one has taken symbols which mean words and one has made the convention that they no longer mean words, but the first sign. For instance the sign for house is *Beth*. This will now mean 'B'. The sign for a camel is *Gimel* and it will now mean 'G' or 'C'. The sign for a bull is *Aleph* and this will now mean 'A'. And there are 26 signs, and with 26 signs you can do it. Now, this is an immense invention. For the following reason: before the invention of the alphabet there were two cultures: the oral culture and the material culture. The oral culture transcoded air waves into symbols called phonemes. And material culture put information into material. Now, oral culture is easy because air waves can be easily manipulated. But it's not very durable because you can understand wrongly when somebody speaks to you. While material culture is much more trustworthy, but it gives you much more work. With the alphabet you have united oral and material culture. A library is at the same time oral and material. And this permits progressive history because now you have a memory, libraries, which you can trust, which are easily made. But as always, any invention is unforseeable in consequences. When you write a language down you change the language. Because while writing it down you become conscious of the rules of the language. Now, before the alphabet was invented you just spoke as you wanted. With the invention of the alphabet you had to obey orthographic and grammatical rules. Now, to speak without discipline has a name: myth. Before the invention of the alphabet people spoke and thought mythically. The alphabet was invented to fight myth. And to substitute for myth: discipline, scientific, philosophical, technical discourse. The alphabet is responsible for the fact, that we have science and technology.

Now, I can imagine that very well in images. I can imagine to show how, for instance, the sign *Aleph* changes, how it becomes part of texture, how it enters the scriptures of the Jews and of the Hellenic philosophers. I would show the parallel between a philosopher and a prophet. I would show how this develops, how magic still survives and myth still survives. But how on the other hand the alphabet becomes more and more dominant.

Next [the fourth program]: For hundreds of years the alphabet was a secret code. It belonged to the priests. The masses were illiterate. The priests, and later the church, lived historically. But the masses lived pre-historically, magically, mythically, they were governed by the texts because they couldn't decipher the texts. And this was the real strength of the church. For instance the emperor

Charles, *Charlemagne*[8], said the famous sentence *Ego, Imperator Germanorum, supra grammaticos sto.*[9] – 'I, the German emperor, I am at top of the grammar schools'. But he was mistaken, it was the church and the church men who really directed history. Now, with the printing press the alphabet became common knowledge. And with that everybody acquired historical consciousness. And this was a catastrophe. It doesn't sound like one, but it was a catastrophe. Because the printing press prints an enormous mass of printing paper. This is a typical inflation. And the inflation devaluates the alphabet and it devaluates historical consciousness. Everybody now had an opinion. But as Plato says an opinion is always false. Nobody had knowledge. This is politics. Politics begins with the printing press. Everybody belongs to a party and nobody is right. And the terrible thing about it is, as we can see, that people are so convinced that they are right, that this leads to things like Nazism and Stalinism. Nazism and Stalinism is the effect of the printing press.

But on the other hand, the moment the printing press begins the elite finds something out. It is a fact that knowledge can not really be written in letters, it should be written in numbers. The reason is, that letters mean words and words are not exact. But numbers mean sets. And sets are exactly definable entities. So that nature in fact is not describable, but perfectly reckonable. You can count nature. And this is why the elite wrote ever less letters and ever more numbers. And the code of numbers is a very difficult code and it becomes ever more difficult as it develops, ever more refined. […] And lately it develops computer codes. So that now we have established the same situation as when the alphabet was invented. When the alphabet was invented, the illiterate mass was governed by the literati because they couldn't decipher what the literati said. And nowadays the literate mass is governed by people who manipulate numbers because nobody can decipher what the numbers mean. And the numbers can influence on history from above because the numbers can build machines. And machines can influence history. True history is made by machines. And nobody can decipher how the machines are made. You can only use them. You can not decipher how they are made because you don't know the equations on which they are based. And this is the situation in which we are now. That would be the fourth program.

I can imagine it very, very well and so can you. Because I think in images. I wrote the thing in function of images. I can see the victory of numbers and of machines over the literate stupid vulgar politicians. I can imagine how Monsieur Mitterand carries with difficulty the responsibility on his shoulders, while he who decides is some computer man in MIT. You know, this I can see. […]

[The fifth program:] Computer invention. The formal post-historical thinking which is due to

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calculation has given us the possibility to destroy history, to calculate it in pieces. For instance to take a decision, calculate the decision into decidemes [Dezideme], put it into a computer and the computer will decide, and will decide better than a man can. The calculating machines show historical action is over and that on top of the historical there is a post-historical, formal, structural thinking which can govern historical political events and politics no longer works.

But as usual this invention has a curious side which was not thought of before. Not only can those machine calculate and destroy history and politics, they can also compute and make alternative worlds. They can take those points into which they have destroyed history and they can make lines and shapes and bodies and moving volumes, what we call alternative virtual spaces, cyber spaces. And this they can put inside history, so that we have alternative possibilities to live several times. Now, we know this, we have seen it. We have seen virtual spaces, we have seen the gloves, how they work. We have seen that in the Gulf war, politics were out, and Mister Bush made us think that he made any decision, but in reality some computers, in which there were scenarios fed, have made the decisions and have made a battle. That Mister Bush has no longer any influence. The end of Russia is a proof how computer thinking destroys politics. Although we know this we can not yet imagine.

But such a program can help us to imagine. Because this is the enormous thing about this project which you subjected to me. That I can show how this new form of thinking destroys history, what *post-histoire* really means. The *post-histoire* does not mean that history is over, post-histoire means that we are on a new level of existence. That everything from the beginning of man 'til the invention of computers is one *étape*. And that now we are on a different level, we are becoming real men. This would be the fifth program. Now, the sixth program."

Edith Flusser: „The conclusion now *[starts reading the last paragraph of Vilém Flussers text* Menschheitsgeschichte als Fernsehdrama[10]*]*: 'Seit etwa zwei Millionen von Jahren gibt es ein eigenartiges Säugetier, das Werte verwirklicht. Seit etwa 40.000 Jahren kann es davon zurücktreten, um sich dieses Drama anzuschauen. Seit etwa 7.000 Jahren erreicht das Tier eine Stufe, von der aus es sich eines Geschehens nicht nur der Ereignisse bewusst ist. Seit etwa dreieinhalb Tausend Jahren wird es fähig in die Geschichte von innen her einzugreifen und jüngst auch von außen her und alternative Geschichten zu machen. Damit ist Geschichte im eigentlichen Sinn beendet. Und etwas ganz anderes, nämlich Geschichten kann beginnen. Und das alles kann ansichtig gemacht werden, wenn man Bilder erzeugt, die die Geste des Herstellens der Bilder und des Bildermachens, des linearen und alphabetischen Schreibens, des Buchdrucks, des Rechnens, des Kalkulierens und des

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[10] Flusser, Vilém (1991). Menschheitsgeschichte als Fernsehdrama [Human History as a Television Drama]. Für LichtBlick, Unpublished typescript, 5 p., VFA-document No. 2463, p. 5

Komputierens zeigen. Kann es ein schöneres TV-Programm geben als dieses?'"

Vilém Flusser: „The last is: Let us have an overview. Two million [years] ago an animal appeared that is capable of realising values and evaluating reality. About 40 thousand years ago, very shortly, this animal succeeded in stepping back from what he is doing and imagining it. About 7 thousand years ago, yesterday, people in Mesopotamia invented linear writing so that they could become aware of processes, of history. About 3.500 years ago, nothing, people invented the alphabet and that made it possible to make science, philosophy and technology. About 500 years ago people invented the press and that made it possible to overcome the alphabet and create numbers that calculate the world. Yesterday it became possible to make machines that do away with history and start new histories. And all this can be shown easily if you show on television how people put their hand into the world, how they step back and make images, how from these images they make texts, how out of the texts they made an alphabet, how out of the alphabet they make a printing press, how out of the printing press they made numbers, how out of the numbers the make a computer, how out of the computer they make a new world. Now, can there be a more beautiful television program than this? […] This is what I suggest. Now, of course it's not easy to make such an image. It takes imagination.[…] I imagine that it can be done. I imagine that it would have a colossal impact, but not a mass impact. […]

It is difficult to say in English: *Imagination und Einbildungskraft.* I define *Imagination* as the capacity to step back from the world and look at it. And *Einbildungskraft* is the capacity to put ideas into an image, which is quite different. For instance a numerically-generated synthetic image would be an example of *Einbildungskraft.* Now, what I was aiming at in this text was images of *Einbildungskraft.* The whole program I did not see as photographic images but, if I may say so, as staged images. I thought a lot of synthetic images and of course with texts spoken and music. For instance, to give you an example, when I spoke of the invention of the printing press, which is in fact the invention of the industrial revolution, I imagine to see the division of work: On one hand you make the information, the form, and on the other hand you press the form on the material. Now, this I imagined like a sort of clip, where two elements come together and intermingle. […]
Now, you say you draw people in, not only does it draw people in it makes them explode. Because nobody has ever seen an image, because those images we see are not really images, they are illustrations. The power of images, we haven't yet discovered. All we see is illustrations. But of course we see images, when you see *Mandelbrot* images[11]. That's an image."

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[11]Benoit Mandelbrot, the mathematician, is famous for the fractal geometries, which bear his name. These were finally able to visualised for the first time by computers in 1978.

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