

## Introduction

The present issue of *Flusser Studies* starts out with three translations, two of which have not been published yet. The first essay, “Aberturas / Openings”, translated by Mario Cascardo, is the first of four essays written by Vilém Flusser regarding the work of Russian-Brazilian painter Samson Flexor (1907-1971). Published in “Suplemento Literário do Estado de São Paulo”. “Openings” is the first of four essays written by Vilém Flusser regarding the work of Russian-Brazilian painter Samson Flexor (1907-1971). Published in “Suplemento Literário do Estado de São Paulo”, the article is marked by a heideggerian-existentialist style and brings up Flusser’s probably first concrete dive into a monstrous imaginary during his years in Brazil, where the philosopher lived between 1940 and 1973. This Portuguese-English translation of “Aberturas” includes one photograph of Flexor with some of his “Bipeds” at the IX Bienal de São Paulo, in 1967.

The second essay, “Ontogenese wiederholt Phylogenese / Ontogenesis repeats Phylogenesis”, translated by Baruch Gottlieb is the first of three introductory texts to Flusser’s last book *Menschwerdung* (Becoming human) that was not completed because of Flusser’s sudden death in 1991. It was published in 1994 by Stefan Bollmann and Edith Flusser with the collaboration of Klaus Sander in *Vom Subjekt zum Projekt* (From Subject to Project).<sup>1</sup> We have already published two other unpublished texts in *Flusser Studies* 12 (“Pünktlich”<sup>2</sup> and “Was man wollen kann”<sup>3</sup>). In “Ontogenesis repeats Phylogenesis”, Flusser compares the development of the individual to that of the species. At the same time, it is the testimonial of Vilém Flusser as a mature person, a summa of his whole thinking. It is a text written in maturity, at the end of the second millennium after Christ. Flusser describes himself ironically as the last Mohican who by writing his history, is also writing the history of the Mohican tribe, that is of the Jews of Prague, most of whom were annihilated in the Holocaust.

In his essay “Spiele / Games”<sup>4</sup>, translated by Nancy Roth, Flusser identifies human beings as *homo ludens*, the playing animal, asserting that the capacity to play is their defining feature. He

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<sup>1</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Vom Subjekt zum Projekt / Menschwerdung*, Bollmann, Bensheim und Düsseldorf, 1994:165-168. In this issue, we publish an earlier typescript version of the text.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/flusser-punktlich.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/flusser-was-man-wollen-kann.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The English version has already been published by Nancy Roth (see [https://nancyannroth.com/?page\\_id=1533](https://nancyannroth.com/?page_id=1533)) who translated from the German version. “Games,” was first published as “Jogos” in the *Suplemento Literário* of *O Estado de São Paulo* on December 9 1967 (see present issue), and as “Spiele” in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on July 31 1968. “Spiele” was reprinted in Florian Rötzer (2013), *Ist das Leben ein Spiel? Aspekte einer Philosophie des Spiels und eines Denkens ohne Fundamente*, Cologne: 4-7.

notes at the outset that it is no longer the difference between humans and animals that is at issue, but a difference between humans and their apparatuses. In supporting his claim, he defines a game as system of elements that regularly combine, then goes on to describe categories of games within which the whole of human communication can be aligned. He focusses on three examples -- chess, language (he chooses Portuguese), and science, using them to introduce terms, e.g. “elements,” “competence,” “repertoire” and “universe,” that apply to games in general but also facilitate comparison and contrast. Above all, he underscores the need for human beings to be aware of the games in which they participate, for only in such an awareness is it possible to actually play a game -- that is, expand and change it, create something new -- as opposed to being played by it, caught in the operations of a fixed, stolid, apparatus. First published in German in 1968, the text introduces terms that Flusser developed further in subsequent writings.

The second section of the issue contains two texts dedicated to photography. In 1990, “European Photography” published a text by Vilém Flusser on the work of the photographer Henry Lewis: „Henry Lewis: X-Spaces.<sup>5</sup> In this essay, which we have reprinted in this issue<sup>6</sup>, Flusser discusses the impossibility to experience space with the eyes. We can only reach as far as the surface of objects, he writes, but radiography penetrates beyond the surface into space. Flusser contends that Henry Lewis is not interested in finding out what is behind the surface, but in making the experience of space visible. He is making pictures of the third dimension. In Rainer Guldin’s recent interview with Lewis that accompanies Flusser’s text (“Brief Encounter with Vilém Flusser. An Interview”), Lewis speaks about his early interest in photography, the years he spent in France before returning to native Australia, and his relationship to Vilém Flusser. His work as a photographer was not only influenced by other photographers like Man Ray – especially the Rayographs –, Tom Dahos, Jürgen Klauke, Juan Fontcuberta, but also by painters and sculptors like Ellsworth Kelly. Lewis got to know Flusser through Andreas Müller-Pohle, to whom he had shown his radiographic work. Müller-Pohle suggested that he make contact with Vilém Flusser in Robion and show him his work. Lewis and his wife visited Vilém and Edith Flusser in the South of France several times. Lewis also talks about Flusser’s influence on his work, the relevance of Flusser’s thought thirty years after his death, and future of photography. We have also included 10 pictures by Henry Lewis.

“Flusser’s Belief” forms one chapter of David Levi-Strauss’s recent book *Photography and Belief* (reprinted here with kind permission of the author and David Zwirner Books, New York

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<sup>5</sup> See also, “Henri Lewis X-Räume, 1989”, in Vilém Flusser, *Standpunkte. Texte zur Fotografie*, Göttingen 1998: 192-194.

<sup>6</sup> We have published the German and English typescripts along with a more readable version of the English text (*European Photography*, 41/11, 1990: 46-47). In the photograph section to the right, you will also find a scan of the *European Photography* edition which contains a few pictures by Henry Lewis,

2020), an examination of past and present convictions about the reality, authenticity, trustworthiness of the photographic image. Following on from considerations of the subjectivity of a photograph as developed by Benjamin, Barthes, and Berger, the photograph's status as a sign and the implications of its indexicality, this chapter suddenly sets photography in a far broader framework. For Flusser recognised the photograph as the onset of a shift in human communications as vast as the invention of writing, introducing visual codes that undermine those of alphabetic writing, and introducing a completely different means of generating and storing information. Although Flusser spoke little of belief as such, he did speak often of doubt. If we accept that doubt is not the opposite of belief, but of certainty, his approach touches continually on questions of belief. For Flusser remains uncertain whether the new society based on technical images -- the photograph being the first of many-- will be the most creatively exciting, humane society the world has ever known, or its very opposite, a mindless network of functionaries.

The third section contains three diverse texts: the first is dedicated to Flusser's relationship to the Brazilian writer Guimarães Rosa; the second recognizes the notion of apparatus in *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*, and the third reconsiders Flusser's conception of the relationship of science and philosophy.

In "Língua é realidade: Vilém Flusser e a obra de Guimarães Rosa", Gabriel Figueiredo and Flávio Tonnetti examine the dialogue established between Vilém Flusser and João Guimarães Rosa around the conception of language as the creator of reality. In this text, we discuss elements of this dialogue about how the two authors understand language, and how this understanding appears expressed in their works, based on essays and testimonies given by both authors around the issue of language. This relationship between these two authors and friends is given from Flusser's point of view, in his account of the profound impact of Guimarães Rosa's literature had on him (prompting him to write several essays on it), and in seeing the experience of his own ideas about language in Rosa's work.

In "‘Documentar algo que no existe’: los modelos discursivos como apparatus en *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*", José Luis Gómez Vázquez explores the concept of "apparatus", proposed by Vilém Flusser in his *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. This implies an analysis of the "production logic" of the artistic work. However, this concept further offers a possibility of reading his *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis* as a rebellion against the discursive rules that themselves work as an "apparatus". By questioning the rules of scientific, philosophical, didactic and literary discourses, Flusser plays with the mechanisms of the discourse and deactivates their automatisms. This leads to questions

about the boundaries of art, creation as a form of knowledge, or imitation and scientific study of reality as a need in artistic, literary creation, a range of methodologies of “scientific creation”.

Olaf Dammann’s “Trying Things Out. A Flusserian Vision for the Future of Science” analyses two early texts by Vilém Flusser in order to explore what may have been his conceptualization of the relationship between science and philosophy. His analysis suggests that Flusser thought of both as tools to analyze reality by analyzing language. While he saw science as a (sometimes too vigorous) force forward, he viewed philosophy as what can prevent some of the negative consequences of such progress. In direct comparison, Flusser thought of science as a discourse with the purpose to provide novel information and of philosophy as what can keep objective science in check by moving the discourse into the realm of the subjective.

Rainer Guldin and Nancy Roth, November 2021