

## Introduction

Migrations have taken place over centuries. They are a fact of human history, and they have invariably marked people and cultures in many different ways all over the world. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly beginning in the 80s and 90s, migrants and international migrations have become topics under investigation in governments, international institutes, and universities as human rights activists and scholars of post-colonial studies, among many others, have challenged the notion of homogeneous societies and cultures that was based on 19<sup>th</sup>-century conceptions of the nation-state, national identity, and “race.” Migrants, expellees, refugees, asylum seekers, cosmopolitans, “world-citizens,” and post-nationalists (those eager to reject the limitations of national or cultural borders and, perhaps, fortunate enough to hold multiple citizenships or work permits) today enter more or less closed communities and locales daily and with fluctuating degrees of appreciation. As Seyla Benhabib put it in *The Claims of Culture*: “The nation-state is, on the one hand, too small to deal with the economic, ecological, immunological, and informational problems created by a more interdependent environment; on the other hand, it is too large to contain the aspirations of identity-driven social and regionalist movements. Under these conditions, *territoriality* is fast becoming an anachronistic delimitation of material functions and cultural identities” (Benhabib 2002: 180). These conditions extend to the migrant who is no longer or not necessarily obliged to forgo citizenship in her/his home country and who is no longer expected or willing to assimilate seamlessly into the cultures of the adopted country.

Loosely referred to as “migrant studies,” at least in the English-speaking contexts, the field examining historical and contemporary migrants and their world-wide trajectories draws theories, data, and interpretations from many different disciplines; indeed, the questions posed today in these disciplines reflect the diverse expertise needed to investigate the rapidly changing geo-political and socio-cultural landscapes across the globe. In *Migration Theory*, Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield have summarized some of the questions that inform the social sciences today. Anthropologists, for example, want to know “How does migration effect cultural change and affect ethnic identity?,” while historians ask “How do we understand the immigrant experience?” and sociologists are interested in “What explains incorporation and exclusion?” (Brettell and Hollifield 2008: 4). Migrants’ behavior, experience, and decision-making are at the center of inquiries in the social sciences – what, then, are the pressing issues of migration studies in the humanities?

While I am not aware of a single list of questions emerging out of literary studies, philosophy or the arts (history was included in *Migration Theory*), of course, many do exist; the answers speak to the individual experience, to the migrant's perception, emotions, hopes, and to his/her creativity, to name a few elements essential to any human experience. In their introduction to the 2003 catalog *Migration*, Friedemann Malsch and Christiane Meyer-Stoll point to Olafur Gislason for guidance: "We see [the exhibition *Migration*] neither as an historical overview nor as a political-enlightening statement. Rather we are interested in the phenomenon of migration in the complexity with which it affects the human being. It is about the 'organic shaping' which leads to migration and, in turn, is moved by it. What does migration do to the human being? Olafur Gislason says: 'I regard migration itself as a personal thing.'" (Malsch and Meyer-Stoll 10). Migration is personal, and literature, art, music, philosophy, and history are directly involved in bringing this personal experience into public debates and into the consciousness of people and their societies.

This issue of *Flusser Studies*, then, seeks to discuss elements of Flusser's work and ideas on migration, including his own identity as a migrant, and how his work on the topic might inform today's scholarship on migration in the humanities. While Flusser's publications on migration are primarily contained in the volume *The Freedom of the Migrant. Objections to Nationalism* (2003), his autobiography *Bodenlos* (1992) and other essays, many of them unpublished, address the pains and possibilities of migration. To say that his own "migration," that is, his escape from Prague in 1939 and his "settlement" in Brazil in 1941, marked his life and thought would be to state the obvious; it would also, however, significantly minimize an experience that began with watching his hometown Prague as it "crumbled and successively fell into the abyss in pieces" (Flusser 1992: 23). Essentially, Flusser's experience of being persecuted, of war, of losing his entire family in the death camps, of finding himself on the shores of a completely foreign culture and language; of being denied an education, of abruptly losing a privileged status, and, for some time, of having to struggle with being alive, deeply influenced and personalized his philosophical method and his work in both practical and metaphorical ways. In a 1990 interview for the French journal *Calades*, for example, he was characteristically adamant about the absurdity of borders: "There is no border line. There are no two phenomena in the world that could be divided by a boundary. It would always be a bad and artificial separation. Phenomena cannot be separated in this way. They also cannot be organized according to straight lines. Phenomena overlap, they happen in layers. I have to point out that in French 'border' is used as a military term: the front. Let's hope that the idea to set boundaries everywhere will wear away: this is a man, this is a woman, this is Germany, and this is France. There are no whites, no

blacks, no pure cultures and no pure disciplines. Every systematic thinking is wrong, every system is a violation. Reality is tangled and therefore interesting. Every Cartesian thinking that creates order is fascist.”<sup>1</sup>

Correspondingly, one of the fundamental and ubiquitous elements in Flusser’s philosophy consists of a theoretical approach that loathes borders of any kind, apparent in the types of questions posed, in the doubts uttered, and in the texts written: as a migrant in life as well as in thought, Flusser refused to be “disciplined” or “nationalized,” preferring to make meaning primarily by living translation and devouring cultures.<sup>2</sup>

The issue begins with the very short and previously unpublished essay by Flusser “Heimkehr?” written upon his return to Prague; we thank Marcel Marburger and the *Flusser Archiv* at the University of the Arts in Berlin for permission to publish it here. The essay was, however, published in Czech as “Navrat Domu” in the review *Prostor* on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1991 (p. 167-68).

The second part of my interview with Edith Flusser follows (the first part was published in *Flusser Studies* 05). Her memories of Brazil are incomplete, of course, and I repeat my call for a cautious reception of memory work in general. My walking her through the memories of the 40s, 50s, and 60s in Brazil was clearly painful, despite her emphasis on happy moments, and her memories would perhaps emerge differently, with a different emphasis, were one to conduct the interview in Brazilian rather than in German. I want to thank her again, in this issue of *Flusser Studies*, for being so generous with her time and for giving us access to her thoughts on thirty years of life in Brazil. A third part of the interview on returning to Europe and settling in Robion, France, shall follow at some later date.

We are delighted to publish parts of chapter 6 in Karen Joisten’s *Philosophie der Heimat – Heimat der Philosophie* (Akademie Verlag, 2003), entitled “Die Welt im Netz,” which focuses on Flusser’s philosophy of “trans-anthropocentrism.” The first part appears in English, and we would like to thank Edward Shaw for his careful translation. We would also like to thank the Akademie Verlag and the author for the kind permission to translate and publish part 6.1. and to re-publish parts 3, 5, and 6 of chapter 6.

While Matthew Goodwin and Gabi Kathöfer focus on immigration to Brazil during World War II and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, respectively, paying attention to the meta-aspects of immigration in Stefan

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<sup>1</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Zwiesgespräche. Interviews 1967-1991*, ed. Klaus Sander, Göttingen, 1996, 97. English translation by Anke Finger.

<sup>2</sup> This passage, the quote and the succeeding sentence, is included in the German version of *Vilém Flusser: uma introdução* (2008) entitled *Vilém Flusser*, Stuttgart, UTB/Fink, 2009, both by Gustavo Bernardo, Anke Finger and Rainer Guldin.

Zweig's *Schachnovelle* and to rewriting the nationalistically inflected historiography of German immigration to Brazil, Christopher Larkosh and Rolf Kailuweit deliberate today's meaning of migration and of nomadism. Larkosh's partly personal investigation concerns the trans-cultural implications of a multi-lingual life, such as one led by Flusser, and Kailuweit addresses the necessary differentiation between "migrant" and "nomad" - a differentiation Flusser himself was reluctant to undertake - and the "practice" of nomadism, practical and metaphorical, in postmodernism.

Nancy Roth and Rafael Cardoso, finally, address two rather dissimilar topics, John Goto's most recent photographic work (Roth) and Flusser's almost unheard of but remarkably prescient *The History of the Devil* (Die Geschichte des Teufels), written in German but published first in Portuguese in 1965 (Cardoso). In her interpretation of Goto's "migrant" images and of photography as an artistic "territory" in general, Roth echoes some of Joisten's work on Flusser's concept of "projecting." Cardoso, likewise, takes one of Flusser's earliest texts to "project" the arch that points us to Flusser's later work on technology and on language, among others, by examining humanity's insistence on progress. *The History of the Devil*, amply reviewed in Brazil, but practically unknown and certainly little reflected on elsewhere, should become one of the pillars of criticism and scholarship on Flusser as it strongly prefigures ideas and concepts that present the foundations of his work in the 70s and 80s.

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Anke Finger

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