

## Introduction

The new issue of *Flusser Studies*, divided into four parts, largely focuses upon the International Flusser-Symposium *Flusser em Fluxo* held at the Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC) in Brazil from May 24th to the 25th, 2012. The First Section, as usual, is dedicated to texts written by Flusser himself. Sections Two and Three contain the proceedings of that Brazilian Symposium. Section Four includes three additional essays exploring original aspects of Flusser's work. We conclude the introduction with a poetic summary of the Symposium "The Fluidity of Flusser" written by Gabriela Reinaldo, co-editor of this issue and the symposium organizer.

Section one opens with two texts by Vilém Flusser: *Retradução enquanto método de trabalho* and *Uróboros*. They come from Gustavo Bernardo's comprehensive Internet site *Dubito ergo sum*, which was unfortunately shut down last year, and therefore is no longer available. More texts from the treasure trove of *Dubito ergo sum* will follow in upcoming issues. In addition, in this first section, we are also starting publishing translations of Flusser's work by Rodrigo Maltez Novaes. The chapter "Our images" from the book *Post-history* is being published here with permission from Univocal, distributed by the University of Minnesota Press, Flusser's main publisher in the United States. Over the next few years, Univocal will publish a considerable number of Flusser translations from Portuguese to English. These include some of Flusser's main works: *Post-History*, *Natural:mente*, *On Doubt*, *The History of the Devil*, *Language and Reality*, *Philosophy of Language*, *Foundational Concepts of Western Thought* and *Importance of Existential Thought*. *Post-History*, an English translation of Vilém Flusser's *Pós-história* was published in March of 2013. It is the first of a total of eight English translations scheduled to come out over the next four years. Each future issue of *Flusser Studies* will contain one chapter from the new Novaes' translations. We thank Univocal for their permission.

Our second section is dedicated to the symposium, and consists of twelve contributions. In the first one, "The philosopher that liked to play: Vilém Flusser's dialogical thinking and his search for freedom," Cesar Baio examines the role of play in Vilém Flusser's thinking. A closer look at this specific aspect shows how the writing itself materializes the philosophy it suggests. Baio focuses on three key concepts: dialog, image as a concept, and the bureaucrat/employee (*funcionário*).

Norval Baitello Junior's "The inhospitable: a small archeology of the concept of space in Vilém Flusser's thinking" proposes an archeology of the concept of space in Flusser's work. In order to do so, he reflects on the inhospitable, which refers to space and spatiality. For Flusser, humanity has gone through three major catastrophes, all related to the concept of space. The first is hominization, a result of the abandonment of the treetops by an animal that had to come to terms with the ground, making itself more vulnerable to predators. The second was the civilizing process, which occurred ten thousand years ago, the nomadic man sits and stays earthbound; space is limited and fills up with others, the guests, who are, at heart, hostile. It is the problem of the other. After those ten thousand years of a sedentary lifestyle, our home became so inhospitable that we went back to being nomads; we are confronted by the inhospitable "within ourselves", thus inaugurating the third catastrophe.

Erick Felinto's paper "Poetic thinking and calculatory thinking: the dilemma of cybernetics and humanism in Vilém Flusser" discusses the complex and contradictory status of cybernetics in Flusser's thought. The strange combination of a humanistic point of view with the destruction of the humanistic subject through cybernetics produce a creative tension within Vilém Flusser's work. It is this creative tension that allows Flusser to establish a dialogue with radically new models of subjectivity, while at the same time remaining faithful to what, according to him, characterizes the apex of human experience: freedom and the willingness to engage in a playful relationship with the surrounding environment.

Osmar Gonçalves' "Aesthetics of Photography: a dialogue between Walter Benjamin and Vilém Flusser" seeks to establish a dialogue between the philosophical aesthetics of Walter Benjamin and Vilém Flusser. For both the photographic apparatus produces a paradigmatic rupture not only in the universe of images but also in our own way of being-in-world. It is not just a new image, but a new apparatus, a medium that brings into play a series of perceptual metamorphosis, introducing new ways of feeling and perceiving the world, radically transforming our relationship with the visible – as well as to its invisible counterpart.

Rainer Guldin's "Fluss/er. Circle – Spiral – Cloud" is an attempt to capture Flusser's thinking and its evolution over the years by focusing on three interrelated images: the circle, the spiral and the cloud. The first two are based on Flusser's translation and retranslation theory negating the notions of simple progress, linearity and hierarchy. The third one is related to the last phase of Flusser's thinking organized around the notions of calculation and the dot-like structure of digital images. Clouds are seen as swarms of free-floating points of view created by calculatory combination, as fields of possibility.

Little is known of Flusser's activities after his return from Brazil to Europe in 1972 – leading him first to Italy, then to France before the end of the seventies. It is fairly unknown, for exam-

ple, that he wrote reviews of Brazilian books about media and communications and evaluated and recommended them or not for publication in France. Michael Hanke's "The scientific foundations of communication: A flusserian criticism of some comunicologists from Ceará" examines three of those texts about *A Comunicação do Grotresco*, by Muniz Sodré; *Sociedade de massa (Comunicação e Literatura)*, by Luiz Beltrão; and *Fundamentos Científicos da Comunicação*, by various authors. Since Flusser hardly makes reference to his activity as a reviewer, those works are of special interest, because they present Flusser as a *connoisseur* of communication theory, including cybernetics and in critical dialogue with contemporary Brazilian and international theory. The reviews Hanke analyzes here also provide information about the reception and history of communication sciences in this period.

Ryuta Imafuku's "Vi varias ruinas" is a video-poem dedicated to the life and work of Vilém Flusser using quotations from Vilém Flusser, Walter Benjamin and Günthers Anders, combining images about Hiroshima and the disasters caused by the Tsunami in March 2011.

Gustavo Bernardo Krause's "The being who denies" develops the Flusserian metaphor of the mirror as a being who denies, relating it to the short stories of Machado de Assis and Guimarães Rosa that bring "The Mirror" as their title. The mirror of these three writers, just as their fiction or their philosophical fiction, denies reality to propose another reality. The article also shows how the thinking of Vilém Flusser is connected with the fiction of God, built by civilization, and thus, with the God of fiction as He appears in the literature.

Gabriela Reinaldo, "On the concept of nature in Vilém Flusser's work: borderline experiences" is a reflection on the relationship of nature and culture, entropy and negentropy in Vilém Flusser's work. This essay discusses the concept of nature proposed by Vilém Flusser and the representations of nature in the work of the writer Guimarães Rosa and of the botanist C.F.P. Von Martius.

Lucia Santaella's "Vilém Flusser, a visionary thinker" deals with Flusser's role as a futuristic prophet of mediatic and social change. There are reasons, detectable nowadays, explaining why at the time Flusser wrote his work he was not yet fully prepared to understand its full scope. Some of Flusser's major conceptual concerns are discussed here as previews of the contemporary cultural scenario.

Márcio Seligmann-Silva, "Flusser's Utopias" argues that for Flusser, Auschwitz revealed the potential utopia embedded in our culture. There can be no political paradise. Because political consciousness is unhappy, every consciousness is unhappy. Flusser's media project was an attempt to project us beyond the Western development that ended in Auschwitz. The utopian traces of his work come to light in his engagement with Brazil, in his informational theory, in his formulation of a positive "Heimatlosigkeit" and of "post-history."

Finally, in “Fluid lessons: art, communication, education,” Antonio Wellington de Oliveira Junior focuses on the relationship between communication, art and education in relation to Flusser’s work.

The third section of the issue contains a series of works elaborated by different Brazilian artists. The *Laboratório de Investigação em Corpo, Comunicação e Arte* that took place during the symposium showed selected Brazilian artworks in relation to Flusser’s theories and concepts. The present issue of Flusser Studies also contains links to a series of video vignettes created by artists from Fortaleza: Lara Vasconcelos, Victor Lopes, Bruno Xavier, Salomão Santana, Luciana Vieira, Juin e/and João Vilnei.



The fourth section contains three additional essays. In “The mystic and the magician. Contrasting technical image and sequential narrative” Marcelo Bolshaw Gomes compares Flusser’s thinking with the ideas of the graphic-writer Alan Moore, showing similarities as well as differences of perspective. In “Science and the Imaginary: photography as a heuristic device” Ana Taís Martins Portanova Barros deals with the epistemological rupture between science and common sense as necessary for the advance of the former which has also lead to forms of scientific iconoclasm. And finally Rachel Cecília de Oliveira Costa’s “Image as language: a flusserian reading” explores the concept of language in Flusser’s book *Língua e Realidade* [Language and Reality]. She emphasizes its comprehensive and symbolic structure, which can be thought of in a restricted or in an ample way.

## Fluxos de Flusser: Fluidity in several voices

International Flusser-Symposium, 24th to the 25th May 2012

Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC), Brazil

*Flusser in Flux* was a dialogue of many voices, fluid and labyrinthine. Flusser is flux, the running of the river: Fluss/er. Downhill, this serpentine water runs towards poetry and in unsuspected ways, making the course of our thoughts more difficult (never easier). But Flusser, as Rainer Guldin reminds us, is also the one who extracts pebbles from rivers in order to turn them into glass. Flusser mixes and separates, decants and promotes the alchemy of extracting from the fluid the little stones – or *calculo*, so that we can allude to the matter of which the technical images are made of.

But if we're talking about muddy waters, our interest is not to make it clear, transparent, which is, in essence a nebulous mistake. We are living a crisis of knowledge, but the question marks, which are the signs that best describe our situation in the world today, as Flusser pointed out, are positive signs: "This new ignorance and naiveté, to which we are condemned due to our crisis, has its advantage. We may see the world around us as if nobody had ever looked at it. We are all pioneers and, as such, we can dare anything."

In this river we find ethereal elements, such as the circles, clouds and spirals Rainer Guldin traces through a panorama of his comprehensive studies on Flusser. But we also find the body, performances, and the erotic, as professor and artist Wellington Jr. underlines, when he enters a classroom, reflecting on Flusser about the crisis of knowledge and the place of liberty. Also on academic ground, but from a different perspective, run the waters of Michael Hanke, who discusses the methodic and discerning role of Flusser as reviewer of scientific publications. In the process of merging waters, it is possible to see the encounter with the other, as well as the game as an instrument for the regeneration of sensibilities. A game that is not only the content of discourse, given that Flusser's writing "materializes his own thinking", argues César Baio while joining Flusser's theories with those of Huizinga about the *homo ludens*. Osmar Gonçalves (coordinator of the Symposium and co-editor of the present issue of Flusser Studies) focusing upon photography and the relations between Benjamin and Flusser also emphasizes the libertarian role of the game. Benjamin himself planned this "secret meeting between generations," even if he could not predict the unfolding of his thought about images on the work of another victim of the Nazis.

This "pure chance", in which we experience the unexpected and the improbable, puts in check the machine and its employees. "Please, play with me," asks Flusser, was quoted by Lúcia

Santaella. She, who, with clarity, leaps, like Vilém Flusser, between apocalyptic and the integrated types, advancing towards the third bank of the river — which is more complex and unstable — in order to explore the visionary character of our author.

Fluidity of Flusser. Fluidity of time and space. Land of the inhospitable – and here, we savor Norval Baitello’s generosity, his casual bringing to light, as one picks pebbles in a river, unpublished texts by Vilém Flusser, while making etymological echoes resonate. An example are the terms hospital and hospice, which he tracks between the lines to expose the tense relations between *hospitalitas* (“having a foreign condition”) and *hostis*, which means *foreigner* and enemy in indo-European – but also (and maybe because of that) of poetry and the encounter, the Symposium harbored the inhospitable Vampyrotheutis in many speeches. Diabolical, it swam and flew (like a bird? A machine?) up to the back land of Guimarães Rosa – the backlands that are not out there, but “inside us”, “which is everywhere” – and disturbed nature, both that of Brazil and Flusser’s, naturally.

Besides Rosa, Dante, Borges, Melville, Kafka, Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mary Shelley, Dostoyevsky, Goethe, Machado, Alain de Botton, and even some who weren’t in the script, showed up. They showed up without showing up, without explanation, without announcement – as is characteristic of them. When discussing “Poetic thinking and calculatory thinking: the dilemma of cybernetics and humanism in Vilém Flusser” Erick Felinto smashes the cockroach of *A paixão Segundo G. H.* [*The Passion According to G.H.*], without citing Clarice [Clarice Lispector], as was common to Flusser as well. Between the lines: conscious, unconscious, utopic, dystopic. It is possible that the author feels startled to read him/herself now, in this magazine. The reason is that, among the authors there are those who sent their texts already edited, and those who had their talks transcribed. From the latter, we’ve tried with effort to capture the silences, the suggested, the tone of voice and its presence. We payed attention to the materiality of speech and to the fiction of science. Thus, Ryuta Imafuku composed a poem (?), an image (?), a dialogue (?) which he sent us telematically. Vampyrotheutian flights. “The utopian and the science fiction author are prophets, or rather, they put themselves in a position of historians of what is to come. In this inversion, the letter comes before the fact”, said Marcio Seligmann.

Contributing to this convergence of waters Gustavo Bernardo observed: “I understand that the main function of fiction is to widen our perspectives, that is, to take us out of our usual perspective and offer us another.” Hand-in-hand with literature, Gustavo, like Márcio, discusses philosophy. With his talk “The being that denies”, Gustavo reflects – and here the verb strains its semantic duplicity: reflection as in thinking and in denial – on the authors in favor of spirituality and those who preserve, like Flusser, doubt. In the end, without reaching exhaustive results (he warns his spectators that he would dare to discuss the unquestionable, “because non-decidable”),

he sums up by making his the last words uttered by Machado de Assis before dying: “Life is good”.

When Neil Armstrong landed on the moon he said to the stars: “That’s one small step for man, one giant step for mankind”. But it was Gagarin who experienced the dazzling poetry when he simply said that the Earth is blue. The most elementary synthesis, the preservation of the surprise, the taste for discovery. Science is poetry. Yes, Machado, life is good.

Of the symposium, we can say that, and more. But Flusser is maze-like and the task of writing an introduction that sheltered these speeches, even more when they took place in fluxes that continue to meander through our thoughts at each new reading, it’s bewildering. We also collected images and sounds from those days, but they proved to be even more fluid than words.

May Borges help us: “Este es el laberinto de Creta. Este es el laberinto de Creta cuyo centro fue el Minotauro. Este es el laberinto de Creta cuyo laberinto fue el Minotauro que Dante imaginó como un toro con cabeza de hombre y en cuya red de piedra se perdieron tantas generaciones como María Kodama y yo nos perdimos. Este es el laberinto de Creta cuyo laberinto fue el Minotauro que Dante imaginó como un toro con cabeza de hombre y en cuya red de piedra se perdieron tantas generaciones como María Kodama y yo nos perdimos en aquella mañana y seguimos perdidos en el tiempo, ese otro laberinto”.

All the pictures to be found in this introduction as well as in the Portuguese version have been taken at the symposium by a series of different photographers.

Gabriela Reinaldo and Rainer Guldin

Fortaleza (Brazil) and Lugano (Switzerland)

May 2013

