

Erick Felinto
Vilém Flusser, Fabulist of Worlds
Fictionalism and Otherness in Flusser's Thought

“Un livre de philosophie doit être pour une part une espèce très particulière de roman policier,
pour une autre part une sorte de science-fiction”

Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*

In the essay “Em luor do espanto” (“In Praise of Wonder”), included in the collection *Da Religiosidade* (*On Religiosity*), Vilém Flusser makes a vigorous defense and praise of the marvelous. By surrendering ourselves to dispassionate science and the instruments of world control, we progressively abandon the sphere of wonder, in which primordial man lived, to enter the atmosphere of boredom. The known, the familiar, the already understood now compose most of our existential scenario. However, Flusser adds, “there still remain, in the current situation, large ‘underdeveloped’ provinces, large islands of wonder floating in the ocean of instruments” (2002a, p. 93). To renounce this experience of wonder would mean giving up a fundamental dimension of human existence. But if we divert our attention from the things (instruments) around us, we still have the possibility of opening ourselves up to the marvelous, of rediscovering that human being of old, for whom the whole of reality was inhabited by gods and fantastic powers. This is a world in which “poets are the first to dive in,” returning from their expeditions with “the first astonished articulations” (2002a, p. 96). This is because poets, artists, and creators devote themselves precisely to the task of seeking out the strange, the new, the wonderful.

In the passages cited above, few readers will notice the contradiction between the two aquatic figures: islands of wonder float in the “ocean” of the predictable, but poets are nevertheless pioneers of “diving” into the waters of wonder. Now, isn't it the aquatic environment that, in Flusser's thinking, represents the horizon of the marvelous? This is very clear in his philosophical fable about *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*, the “vampire squid of hell,” which inhabits the abyssal depths and awakens the irresistible fascination of all who encounter it. Furthermore, did Flusser not write that the aquatic environment is the appropriate environment in which “the potentialities of life can be realized” (1998, p. 24)? In *Dinge und Undinge*, the “ocean of sleep” (*Ozean des Schlafes*) is contrasted

with the "moving archipelago" of waking life (1993a, p. 99), while in *The History of the Devil*, the ocean carries the "allegory of the circulation of water [...] the aspect of liquidity, fluidity, and lability" that represents the flow of vital processes, the endless wheel of life (2010, p. 55)¹. All of this seems to point to a slight inconsistency. It should not be the islands, but rather the mysterious seas that are *the* proper *locus* of the marvelous. The land is the horizon of the already explored, while the ocean continues to hold secrets and enigmas. The simplest explanation for this inconsistency seems to be proportionality: while islands are few and far between, the ocean is vast and immeasurable. This is how the marvelous manifests itself in our lives: as something extremely rare today, as small eruptions of the strange in an ocean of banality. It is, as Alfred Wild states in his enigmatic *Traité du Mystère*, an "incision in normality" (1956, p. 75), a breach in the world of "the hegemony of technology and utilitarianism" (ibid., p. 73). For us, men of modern technology, mystery, wonder, and amazement are tiny tears in the fabric of everyday reality.

Given this, it is not surprising that Flusser's thinking has encountered so much criticism and resistance in the conservative domain of the university. All of his work is permeated by an imaginative power that refuses to abandon mystery in favor of rational linearity. If, as he liked to repeat, evoking Nietzsche, "Kunst ist besser als Wahrheit"², thought must always involve an element of risk, a fictional dimension that implies the search for the marvelous. It was in this nebulous realm between reality and fiction, dedicated to an aesthetic of wonder, that I encountered Flusser. His texts often reminded me of Borges' exercises in deceiving the reader, his recurring strategy of confusing and misleading for the sake of entertainment, of quoting non-existent books or inventing obscure thinkers. More than that, Borges professed a passion for the "weird ones," those marginal, forgotten writers, always "inclined to propose unusual actions or themes" (Camurati, 2006, p. 23). A tactic of deception, of decoy, is, in fact, central to the existence of *Vampyroctentis Infernalis*, which, through false signals and luminous displays (thanks to the chromatophores in its skin), manages to "deceitfully entice the receiver" (*die Empfänger lügnerisch verführen*) (Flusser, 2002b, p. 65). While we humans philosophize to attain truth, the vampire squid philosophizes to forever deceive others (ibid., p. 52). But is philosophizing limited to this classic search for truth? We know that philosophy feeds on fiction; Derrida even states that all philosophical discourse presupposes a certain degree of fictionality (apud Szendy, 2011, p. 66). In its dialogue with fictionality, thinking constructs hypotheses, imagines possible worlds, and pursues the *new*. Philosophy begins with wonder, suggests Flusser, evoking Aristotle (2002a, p. 96).

¹ The translations from Portuguese, Spanish and German are my own.

² The phrase can be found, for example, in *Vom Subjekt zum Projekt* (1994, p. 145). In reality, Nietzsche does not seem to have written this phrase, although he would have probably subscribed to the idea. In one of his fragments, he states: "Truth is ugly; we have art so as not to perish from the truth" (16, 40). Cf. Nietzsche, 1999, p. 500.

Here, therefore, we find a curious articulation between wonder, fiction, and deception. Since I began reading Flusser, I have been accompanied by this striking sensation that none of his texts are devoid of fictional tones and a sense of wonder. Curiously, it is largely because of a certain class of contemporary instruments – digital technologies – that “the distinction between image and thing, fiction and reality, becomes increasingly inoperable” (Flusser, 1994, p. 19). The artificial universes and things that such technologies offer us generate a process in which abstractions are continuously projected into increasingly concrete worlds (*ibid.*). In his writings, Flusser clearly perceived the power of fiction and understood that it is not the enemy of thought. Very possibly influenced by a reading of Hans Vaihinger's *The Philosophy of As If* (2017, 1924), the philosopher dotted his texts with fables, myths, and fantasies that never shied away from flights of imagination. In them, fiction and theory often celebrate harmonious unions, making philosophical fictions tools for creative thinking, always open to the future and to the new.

Part of this thinking consists in promoting a permanent exchange of viewpoints (*Standpunkte*), not only human, but also non-human, as shown, for example, in Undine Stabrey's study on imaginability (*Vorstellbarkeit*) in relation to the perspective of grass and plants. This is an “active knowledge” (*aktives Wissen*) engendered by a change of perspective (2021). In his as yet unpublished essay *Vom Pflanzenreich* (*From the Plant Kingdom*), Flusser proposes a vegetal (*vegetarisch*) point of view as a way of gaining distance from ourselves. However, if we wish to engage in conversation with plants, we must be able to give them a voice, which can only be achieved through a temporality very different from our own. And how can such temporality be produced? Precisely by means of a technological instrument: the technical resources of cinema can generate the rapid temporality necessary for a vegetal dialogue – after all, film makes it possible to both slow down and speed up time. In this conversation, we understand more deeply how the rooted essence of plant life contrasts with our uprooted existence. Plants are, thus, the roots of our “spirit,” as Flusser (1987, p. 4) poetically states.

More than simply a fictionalization of non-anthropocentric places, this perspectivist practice is a gesture of empathy toward other beings, a rapprochement with the natural world in the fallen state in which we find ourselves after the rupture between nature and culture. As Fritz Breithaupt shows, every true process of empathy involves fictionalization. We imagine ourselves—we pretend, as the poet would say—in the other's shoes to try to understand something of their pain and dilemmas. And if we will never be able to feel exactly what the other feels, at least we have a perspective that can complement their vision, since we enjoy the distance that they cannot obtain in relation to their own situation. By “aestheticizing,” therefore, we manage to clarify the other's position (Breithaupt, 2017, p. 17). Fictionalizing is thus a game of proximity and distance.

We draw closer through empathetic gestures, but at the same time we are always at a certain distance due to the difference in our existential positions. With its extreme slowness, its relative immobility, its rooted nature, plant life is alien to us (just as we also seem radically foreign to it). The same is true of the vampire squid from hell, described by Flusser throughout as an inverted mirror of man. In an interesting coincidence, Breithaupt cites the case of mollusks to criticize our anthropocentrism, which “probably contributed to our treating species distant from us, such as birds and octopods, in a somewhat negligent manner” (2017, p. 26). Thus, in Flusser's perspectivism, we find the core of an essential generosity towards others, the dialogical foundation of his thinking (inspired by the philosophy of Martin Buber).

It is no coincidence that practically all of Flusser's work has a literary flavor. His arguments move between metaphors and wordplay, in the form of poetic science or scientific poetry. His thinking flows in imaginative currents that transport the reader to wonderful and unheard-of worlds. The powers of the false become tools of heterodox knowledge, which does not hesitate to navigate turbulent seas. The search for the marvelous is even materialized in the names (fictional or not) of the creatures that inhabit his texts: *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*, *Bibliophagus Convictus*³. Flusser's proximity to the fantastical universe of Borges has already been pointed out by several interpreters. Wanderlei Dias da Silva, for example, evokes the metaphysicians of the imaginary land of Tlön, who, according to Borges, “do not seek truth or even verisimilitude: they seek wonder. They believe that metaphysics is a branch of fantastic literature” (Da Silva, 2021, p. 84; Borges, 2009, p. 836). Flusser seems to do the same in his philosophical fictions. This attitude is in accordance with the principle expressed in the introduction to *Religiosity*, according to which “literature, whether philosophical or not, is the place where the sense of reality is articulated” (Flusser, 2002a, p. 13). Reality is what we believe in. In other words, in a way, this sense of reality is analogous to religiosity, since it entails the central question of belief. Today, however, major technological and cultural transformations have led us to a sense of unreality and, therefore, to a search for new meanings of reality.

Therefore, we must agree with Petra Gropp when she suggests that, for Flusser, “theories of knowledge, philosophy, and aesthetics [...], as well as literature” should be understood as “practices of projecting vital worlds and realities” (*Praktiken des Entwerfens von Lebenswelten und Realitäten*) (2006, p. 232). Thus, theory and fiction intertwine not only with the aim of producing knowledge about this world, but also of imagining other possible worlds. The future, as an ever-open potentiality, will be shaped by our beliefs and fictions. The search for the marvelous means that no possibility is excluded in principle. If philosophizing is preserving a sense of wonder at the reality

³ This is the scientific name of the imaginary insect described by Flusser in the section 13° of *Angenommen* (2000), a creature that feeds on printed texts and stores the digested information in its genetic code.

that surrounds us, fictionalizing allows us to constantly renew this sense of the marvelous. After all, “we cook up worlds in random ways and do so at least as well as the Creator did in the course of the famous six days. We are the master sorcerers, the *designers*, and this allows us, since we have surpassed God, to sweep the question of reality beyond all the edges of the table and the edges of Immanuel⁴: real is what is respectable, efficiently and conscientiously computed in forms, while unreal (e.g., dreamlike, illusory) is what is clumsily computed” (Flusser, 1993b, p. 20)⁵.

The term *designer* is important here, because when Flusser associates *design* with the ideas of “cunning” and “fraud,” he implies that the designer is “a malicious conspirator who delights in setting traps” (2008, pp. 181–182). In this sense, the designer's activity is somewhat similar to the existential form of Vampyroteuthis, given that it is “a culture of deception, of as-if (*Als-ob*⁶), of the false. It could also be called a culture of art in the broadest sense of the word” (2002b, p. 51). The vampire squid's communication consists of setting traps to deceive the other, capturing it. The designer, on the other hand, uses malice to “deceive nature through technique” (2008, p. 184). In the essays collected in *The Codified World*, Flusser likens the designer to a deity, something that is most clearly manifested in the final article, “Design as Theology.” However, a fundamental statement appears only in the original German version of the collection, organized by Fabian Wurm (*Vom Stand der Dinge*). In “Shamanen und Maskentänzer,” Flusser proposes that “design means, among other things, destiny. This questioning is an attempt to take destiny into our own hands in order to shape it collectively” (1993b: p. 104). In other words, *design* is, ultimately, a projection of possible worlds and/or futures.

Such ideas, I believe, allow us to think of Flusser as a philosopher who reasons in ways very similar to those of Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar. In his work *Designs for the Pluriverse*, Escobar argues in favor of a new non-functionalist, rational, or industrial definition for the activity of *design*. What we need today is a transitional *design*⁷, founded on a relational worldview. If *design*, in its ontological dimension, implies that every object or tool engenders “particular ways of being, knowing, and doing” (2017, p. x), perhaps we are now experiencing the ideal historical moment to reconfigure design as a practice that should contribute to “the transition from the hegemony of

⁴ Here there seems to be an interesting and amusing play on words: “Immanuelkanten” can refer both to the “edges of Immanuel,” that is, the margins of God’s creation (Immanuel: “God with us” in Hebrew, a name also associated with Jesus in the Christian tradition) as well as a pun on the name of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose famous phrase “I had to suppress/suspend (*aufheben*) knowledge in order to make room for belief” allows us to draw some parallels with Flusser's arguments (KANT, B XXX, 1956, p. 28).

⁵ The translator of the Portuguese version of the text, included in *O Mundo Codificado*, chose to ignore the play on words with “Immanuelkanten.”

⁶ Here, the evocation of Hans Vaihinger's famous work, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (1911), is clear. I am using the second edition, from 1924, reproduced by Amazon Distribution in 2017.

⁷ That is, one that promotes the transition between different models of the world.

modernity's one-world ontology to a pluriverse of socionatural configurations; in this context, *designs for the pluriverse* becomes a tool for reimagining and reconstructing local worlds" (2017, p. 4).

Highly influenced, like Flusser, by cybernetics and systems theory, Escobar defends the notion that there is not just one world (based on an eminently Western and rationalist view), but several, even if they are sometimes marginalized—for example, those of the subaltern communities of the global South. From this perspective, design can be rethought from an *ontological-political* point of view that necessarily implies the creation of *futures that have a future* (2017, p. 9). In the face of the serious ecological crisis and the enormous inequalities that the Western model has confronted us with, it is therefore necessary to imagine alternative worlds, whose inspiration *design* can find in the matriarchal, communal, and inclusive cultures (in the sense of also taking non-human agents into consideration) of indigenous peoples. This type of proposition aims to rescue the right to imagine alternatives to the current model. The outside of capitalist realism (Fisher, 2009) may be found in the powers of dreams. However, this is not a naive belief in the capabilities of the imagination, but rather a realistic perception of how imaginaries weave reality, which is always socially constructed. And it is no coincidence that belief in the powers of imagination increases in the context of a civilization of images and so-called virtual technologies. For Flusser, it was very clear that we are experiencing a new regime of images, which also implies a "new imagination." In this context, the existential situation of humanity undergoes a radical change, in which we move from subjects of objects to *projects* that are always open⁸. Thus, it is not just a matter of imagining new worlds, but new forms of the human. What we are, as well as the world around us, is formed by a plastic material that the imagination must shape, with the help of the technological tools at our disposal. On this point, too, there is an interesting agreement between Flusser and Escobar. After all, as the latter states in *Designs for the Pluriverse*, designing human beings themselves "is one of the most direct and consequential lessons of the ontological approach to design" (Escobar, 2017, p. 117). This naturally implies the idea of a transcendence of the anthropocentric and rationalist foundations of the Western subject in a variety of post-human possibilities—something with which Flusser would also fully agree. Also echoing the Czech-Brazilian thinker, Escobar mentions the "futuring potential of science and technology" (2017, p. 19). The impacts of the digitization of society are driving designers to adopt new rules for their activity that take into account certain fundamental aspects of new technologies (interactivity, user participation, etc.). Escobar touches on this theme repeatedly throughout the book. Quoting Hans Kommonen, the anthropologist states that digital design also implies designing society (*ibid.*, p. 41). After all, digital products emerge within society and

⁸ For a competent and detailed analysis of Flusser's reflections on techno-images and the new imagination, see IR-RGANG (2023).

consequently transform it, as well as inaugurating ways of being and ways of doing, shaping what it means to be human (ibid., p. 110). They help us imagine the future.

Imagining scenarios, future possibilities, alternative worlds, is the exercise practiced by Flusser in *Angenommen* (*Let's suppose*). In a sequence of 22 scenes (*Szenenfolge*), the thinker depicts different themes and situations in the form of ironic and moral fables, futurology essays, and philosophical fictions. The opening scene originates precisely from a computer simulation in which a futurologist attempts to predict the paths and actions of a terrorist. There is a field of possibilities that "behaves more like a congress of ghosts (*Gespenssterkongreß*)"⁹ (Flusser, 2000, p. 7), given the immateriality of the many virtual possibilities. It is possible to manipulate this future, since we have freedom of choice, argues Flusser. Contradictorily, however (a rhetorical strategy typical of our philosopher), it is concluded that it is impossible to anticipate the future; it is an unreasonable undertaking given the enormous number of imponderables and the unpredictability of human actions. Any future must also incorporate *the Graue Zone* – a “gray zone,” a notion that haunts all of Flusser’s work – that undefined territory of the multiplicity of othernesses *co-implicated* in our destiny. After all, the future is a collective construction, as Escobar also repeatedly points out. We all live, ultimately, in a “relational matrix” (Escobar, 2017, p. 12).

The figure of otherness, an equally obsessive theme in Flusser's thinking, returns precisely in the last scene. Entitled "A Pause to Breathe" (*Atempause*), the scene revisits the dialectic between two symbolic figures who confront each other (the futurist and the terrorist, the philosopher and the hero, the artist and the merchant, etc.). While one of them sees the journey through time and possibilities as love of knowledge, the second sees it as love for the other. And this “other” represents not only the others who surround me, but also the “entirely other” (*das ganz Andere*). Among all the things that make up our world, the other is the one who responds to our dialogical appeal. It is he who says "you" in response to my "I." And in the voice of our neighbor who says "you" to us, "we perceive the *soft call of the entirely other*" (Flusser, 2000, p. 76, my emphasis). But what exactly is this “entirely other”? Beyond a vague suggestion of divinity, I believe it is the same philosophical figure that is central to Peter Szendy’s magnificent work, *Kant chez les extraterrestres: philosophies cosmopolitiques* (2011)¹⁰. What Szendy calls *tout autre*, “whose radical otherness cannot be located in a

⁹ The idea here recalls a passage from Borges' famous short story, *El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan* (*The Garden of Forking Paths*), in which the protagonist, imbued with a secret mission, must assassinate his interlocutor (a renowned expert on the philosophical work of one of his ancestors). At one point, discussing with his host, Stephen Albert, the notion of temporality elaborated by this ancestor, the protagonist imagines a multiplicity of possibilities and alternative doubles, "busy and multiform in other dimensions of time," while Albert speculates on unrealized temporal possibilities: "in another [time], I am a mistake, a ghost" (Borges, 2009, p. 873).

¹⁰ Szendy does not mention Flusser at any point, yet the similarities between his propositions and Flusser's universe are striking: we find the same defense of the power of imagination in philosophical works, a notion of “*philosophofiction*” which is practically equivalent to Flusser’s philosophical fictions, the theme of the point of view (*Standpunkt*), the relationship with otherness, the figure of the alien, etc.

circumscribed outside” (2011, p. 56), is the central entity of a “philosophical fiction of other worlds and extraterrestrial life” (ibid., p. 99). This fundamental otherness preserves the point of view (*Standpunkt*) from which we recognize ourselves in the gesture of radical estrangement. More than that, the entirely-other, the wholly-other, is the axis around which the very problem of the point of view revolves, “the fictitious (*fictif*) access to *the point of view of this point of view*”; the expression of a “reason to come, in becoming” (Szendy, 2011, pp. 138-139). It is Vampyroteuthis Infernalis, it is Bibliophagus Convictus, it is us every time we manage to leave anthropocentrism behind and start a conversation with the alien; every time we dare to imagine *other* futures and *other* possibilities.

The other is, therefore, not only my neighbor, my fellow human being, but also the embodiment of an otherness that allows us to always affirm the possibility of other forking paths, of other worlds and “revolutionary projects for the future” (Flusser, 2000, p. 31)¹¹. In an era of radical ecological, political, and economic crisis, abandoning revolutionary projects means giving up on the possibility of a future for humanity. The most urgent task of theory is to theorize alternatives, and this requires the powers of imagination. It is now time to transform the world, but to do so, we must first reimagine it. It is no coincidence that, in addition to all the crises mentioned above, we are also experiencing a period of intense collapse of the imagination. Surrounded by images and fictions, truly creative imagination, especially in the political sense, seems to be becoming increasingly rare (Cf. Bottici, 2014, p. 1). It is probably no coincidence that the renewed interest in Flusser's thinking, expressed especially in the number of translations of his works into English over the last 20 years, but also in the constant references to a key text, precisely *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis* (Cf. Maoilearca, 2015; Thacker, 2015; Peters, 2015)¹², is accompanied by a renewed interest in the question of the imaginary and the power of fiction (Cf. Appiah, 2017; Benjamin, 2024; Gabriel, 2021). Gradually, theory is beginning to surrender to its powers, and academic thought is opening up to the force of images. The future remains open to those who, like Flusser, dare to imagine it in all its radicality.

¹¹ Here Flusser uses the verb “futurisieren” (*to futurize*), reminiscent of the way Escobar uses the English neologism “futuring”: “To the naturalized destructiveness that has accompanied the anthropocene, [...] we need to oppose the cultivation of new qualitatively new modes of *becoming* through the very futuring potential offered by the artificial” (ESCOBAR, 2017, p. 18).

¹² An interesting coincidence is that most of the recent works that cite *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis* were published in the same year, 2015. The first English translation of the book, based on the original Portuguese, was published in 2011 (New York: Atropos). The second, based on the German version, is probably the best known, published in the “Posthumanities” series by the University of Minnesota Press in 2012.

Postscript: Waiting for Flusser

In 1993, as part of my graduate studies in literature at UERJ, an edition of *Cadernos do Mestrado* recovered a text by Flusser originally published in 1967 with the curious title “Esperando por Kafka” (“Waiting for Kafka”)¹³. It was then that I had my first encounter with the Czech thinker. I remember, of course, having heard of *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, probably his best-known work. However, I had not yet been interested in reading it. It was through Kafka, whose explorations in the realm of the fantastic have always fascinated me, that I found Flusser. I still remember how impressed I was by that combination of academic rigor and radical imagination so characteristic of the thinker. The idea of *God's disgust for himself* (2002, p. 77)¹⁴, so brilliantly articulated by the author, never ceased to amaze me. An obsession was born. The second, after my almost unhealthy fixation with Borges, whose collection of short stories *Ficciones* I found in my grandfather's small library. Possibly the most honest title in the history of literature, I thought at the time. This combination was not accidental, given that the problem of the relationship between reality and fiction, common to both Borges and Flusser, would occupy me throughout my life. Years later, I heard about *Vampyrotenthis Infernalis*, believing it to be a book about vampires (I wasn't completely far from the truth). Given the lack of a Portuguese translation at the time, I decided to risk my incipient German with the small volume from *European Photography*. It was an epiphany. I realized that Flusser, much more than a thinker on communication and media, was a theorist of imagination. His conceptual boldness, combining fiction with scientific reporting, would only years later become established as a minimally acceptable practice in the humanities.

I felt I needed to get to know these two worlds that permeated Flusser's thinking: Kafka's mysterious Prague, where he experienced his first intellectual formation, and pragmatic but philosophical Germany, whose culture and language Flusser absorbed completely. In 2010, I began a postdoctoral internship at the Universität der Künste under the supervision of Siegfried Zielinski, then curator of the Flusser Archive, located in the charming building on Grunewaldstraße in Schöneberg. There, I immersed myself in Flusser's many unpublished texts. I then came across strange creatures and animals of all kinds, aliens, strange essays in which cars served to trigger reflections on Western philosophy or propose an epistemology to seek truth in its opposite, through a *reductio ad absurdum* in which a particular perspective of reality is gained thanks to a journey through fiction¹⁵. I thus understood that it was the belief in the power of fiction that brought

¹³ FLUSSER, V. *Da Religiosidade: a literatura e o senso da realidade*. São Paulo: Comissão Estadual da Cultura, 1967.

¹⁴ Thinking about this idea today reminds me of the wild imagination of Philipp Mainländer, for whom God committed suicide so that the world could exist. Cf. Mainländer, 1989.

¹⁵ Vilém Flusser, “Science Fiction,” orig. pub. in March 1989, Available at *Flusser Studies* 20 (December 2015), <https://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusser>

Flusser and Borges together. As the Argentine suggests in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, fiction can shape reality; it has the capacity to transform the world. In the afterword, I wrote for the new Portuguese edition of *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*, I state that Flusserian reason is dreamlike reason, an artistic and theoretical exercise in the construction of worlds¹⁶.

I have always considered myself a “marginal” Flusserian. I never liked the idea of specialization, much less that of producing footnote knowledge¹⁷. What continually fascinated me about Flusser, much more than interpreting him, was the possibility of placing him in dialogue with ideas of the present. The prophetic dimension of Flusser's thinking, which brings him closer to authors such as McLuhan and Walter Benjamin, demands that we read him through the lens of contemporary times. In his work on the theme of fiction, Markus Gabriel argues that all perception involves an element of illusion, so that “only those who are capable of deceiving themselves (*sich täuschen*) can grasp the truth” (2021, p. 22). Not surprisingly, the philosophy and art of *Vampyroteuthis* are based on deception (*Täuschung*), lies, and fiction (Flusser, 2002, p. 62). The paradox we face today is that the same fictions that feed our imagination of alternative futures can be used for shady political purposes, as *Vampyroteuthis* does to deceive and cannibalize its neighbor. This is perhaps the most important lesson that Flusser's fictionalism holds for our present. We are surrounded by conspiracy theories, *fake news*, and political fictions whose ultimate purpose is to maintain the current status quo and justify the dominant economic and cultural models. It is therefore necessary to produce other fictions that value difference and otherness; it is necessary to understand how the imaginary operates and shapes our realities. It is essential that we feed our imagination with vital powers and a spirit of exploration. Prophetically, Flusser warned us of the dangers of an imagination based on the panic of difference and the fear of the new. If there is one thing I learned from the alchemist of Prague, that (always marginal and rootless) explorer of deep abysses, it was not to allow reason to occupy all the space of thinking. Thinking without images is like a feijoadá without “borogodó”¹⁸. Seasoning reason with fantasy is an important therapy for all kinds of totalitarianism, because, as a philosopher of the lineage of dreamers taught us, “Reason is Power, and Power can hardly desire that anything escape it” (PIN, 1974, p. 85). Even if this were the best of all possible worlds, as Leibniz proposed (a conviction that is proving increasingly untenable today), we cannot help but imagine other worlds. Not least because this exercise helps us to better understand our

studies.net/files/media/attachments/hanff-science-fiction.pdf.

¹⁶ Felinto, E. “Vampyroteuthis, or the encounter with the entirely other,” in Flusser, V. *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*. São Paulo: Flusser: É Realizações, 2023.

¹⁷ This is how I define all knowledge produced about Flusser, which boils down to commenting on and doing the exegesis of his texts as inerrant gospels.

¹⁸ Feijoadá is a very popular Brazilian dish, composed by beans and pork meat. “Borogodó”: slang that indicates a certain charm, mojo, a seductive *je-ne-sais-quoi* - a concept developed in an interesting way in the works of my friend Nelson Job. See, for example, *Livro na Borogodança* (2024).

supposed reality by confronting it with its inverted mirror. “For understanding such a mirror, in order to recognize oneself in it, is the purpose of every fable” (Flusser, 2011, p. 134). Including this fable of mine about the fabulous worlds of Flusser.

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