Introduction

Flusser Symposium in Lublin

Vilém Flusser and media culture. On the dialogue between words, writing and technical images

The authors of Polish interpretations of Flusser, appearing in this issue of "Flusser Studies", met in Lublin on March 6, 2019 at the local "House of Words" – one of the places which belong to the "Grodzka Gate - NN Theatre" Centre. The aim of the first seminar part of our meeting was to present and discuss the main theses of articles prepared for "FS". The second part of the meeting was dedicated to the promotion of two books: a collection of Flusser's essays entitled *Kultura pisma. Z filozofii słowa i obrazu* (Culture of Writing. Philosophy of Word and Image, translated and annotated by Przemysław Wiatr, Warsaw 2018) – this is the second Flusser book translated into Polish together with *Towards the Philosophy of Photography* – and the monograph of Przemysław Wiatr entitled *W cieniu posthistorii. Wprowadzenie do filozofii Viléma Flussera* (In the shadow of post-history. Introduction to the philosophy of Vilém Flusser, Toruń 2018) – this, on the other hand, is the first such study in Polish.

The place of the described events was not accidental. The "Grodzka Gate - NN Theatre" Centre (http://teatrnn.pl/) is a memorial place and a cultural institution. Its program is interdisciplinary, combines scientific, museum, documentary, publishing, educational, artistic and animator activities. In its own way, the Centre tells about the cultural and historical heritage of the city that used to be a part of the multicultural borderland situated between Eastern and Western Europe. The axis of the program is the "Grodzka Gate", a former passage between the Christian city and the former Jewish city. The "House of Words" is an artistic and educational part of the Centre, built around the meaning of the word in culture and social life. It houses a pre-war printing house – currently the place of the "Chamber of Printing" – with original, over a century old machines on which unique prints are made today – they are created accompanied by workshops, meetings and events devoted to printing. A staff member of the "House of Words", an artist-typesetter, Robert Sawa (see https://www.facebook.com/rob.es.54), created, especially for our meeting, an original poster, whose design looks like a materialization of Flusser's idea on the medium of printing and typography.

Here is the artist's commentary to his work: "To interpret the subject I had only typesetting material, i.e. wooden and metal fonts and brass sticks. This is not a very rich palette, nevertheless

it is my workroom and I feel quite good in it, as it allows me transfer my personal attitude to different issues related to topics appearing in the composing room.

A placard for the seminar on the philosophy of Vilém Flusser allowed me to reveal my attitude to today's world. I work using a method from the 17th century. I do everything by hand, that is, I put the fonts into the matrix, and paint them with a roller; the printing process itself is also done with the strength of my back and abdomen, and I receive all information from the machine through my hands. However, I work with the machine, which is mastered in a way that it is me who controls the situation, not the machine. The typesetting material comes entirely from the epoch. They are wooden fonts from the turn of the 19th and 20th century and metal fonts cast from the 1980s. I used fonts in several cuts to set the placard: "Modena" is a classicistic Roman designed in 1923, "Nikolas Cochin", also a Roman, designed in 1912, with old style digits. I used a few block fonts that would refer to the present, which strongly values sans-serif script.

I wanted the composition to be created in the style of old typography, purely axially and classically. The main motive was to interlace sizes of the script of two languages – words and the hexadecimal system, i.e. the language of the machines. Everything was meant to be in a column, written with classic typefaces. A notation of the hexadecimal code using nautical digits worked out very well. The column is opened with the words "ABOUT THE DIALOGUE" which are written in "Modena" capital letters in 48p. And it is closed by the numbers of the same cut and size, which is the effect of the lack of "Cochin" font in the right amount which is a situation strengthening creativity in the composing room. The centre of the column contains the "process" of interlacing, i.e. the title of the seminar written in a classic manner and in the language of digits going round with each other in the size of the script.

An additional element of the placard is the quote from the Flusser's essay "Alphanumeric Society", written in a column of almost 280 digits, without any translation into human language. This procedure aims at making readers aware that the old "school" of culture and art feels resentment towards contemporary times, and even if it does not feel that, the author of the placard for sure does. To this quote, I devoted over four days of hard and arduous work just to show my personal attitude to contemporariness which tends to be disrespectful of tradition and art. This is my approach to its nonchalance in all aspects of cultural life. Interesting is the fact that when I was choosing the quotation I already knew how to implement it (a hexadecimal system), but I did not known which of the citations suggested by Przemysław Wiatr I would actually pick. I had quotes without bibliographic descriptions so I did not know the titles of the publications, which they come from. I chose a quote that, in my opinion, went well with my everyday life in the composing room, and at the same time suited the place where the seminar is held.

After I got to known that I would be able to compose it and fit it in the placard, I asked Przemysław Wiatr about the title of the essay. When I finally got my hands on it, I realised that it was all slightly beyond me. I did not have an idea yet of how the placard would look like. I still did not known what quote I would choose. Everything had taken place en passant, so my surprise was huge.

During the printing process, as I took the first print from the machine, I realized that what had happened was something uncommon. In front of my eyes, the placard conveyed all the work I had put into its composition, something no monitor will ever show. The texture of the paper, imperfections of the imprinted fonts, delicate smudging and blemishes appearing in the printing process, worn wooden typefaces in the name of the philosopher and classic, beautifully cut Romans – all this together conveyed an effect that only those who look at it personally will come to know."

The first contribution of the issue is by Marianna Michałowska. In "Expanding photography – Flusser and Polish intermedia photography", Michałowska analyzes some of the reasons for the popularity of Vilém Flusser's ideas on media and history in Polish "photography as art" at the end of 20th century. The paper focuses on two photographical 'case studies' by artists who actively employed Flusser's vision of media in their art: Stefan Wojnecki and Piotr Wołyński.

Agnieszka Hudzik's "Von der telematischen Gesellschaft zur retrotopischen Stammesgemeinschaft: Zbigniew Liberas Film *Walser* (2015)" (From Telematic Society to Retrotopic Tribe: Zbigniew Libera's Film Walser (2015) takes its lead from Vilém Flusser's reflections on video to examine the first and only feature film of the Polish visual artist Zbigniew Libera, *Walser* (2015), which is set in a post-apocalyptic age.

Piotr Zawojski's "Flusser, media theory and I. From the genealogy of thought" is a case study of a coincidence, both in terms of the author's personal perspective and his encounter with Vilém Flusser's philosophical and theoretical thought. The author also recalls his experiences with preparing the two Polish editions of *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, which were published in 2004 and 2015, and undoubtedly contributed to the popularization of Flusser's concepts among artists, media theorists and philosophers.

In "Biomedia and anthropology of gestures and body", Piotr Celiński develops two of Vilém Flusser's thesis about life as a design project and the need for a new anthropology of gestures. The narrative moves from the modern understanding of technology, digital media and its cybernetic regime to the discovery of biomedia and their ability to invade and conquer bodies, senses and gestures.

In "Vilém Flusser's technical image: performative inspirations", Marcin Sanakiewicz tries to answer to the question whether Vilém Flusser can be called a performative. Performance studies are based on both the philosophy of language and anthropology, as well as on the study of theatrical phenomena and everyday practices. Is there therefore a the possible kinship between Flusser's concept of technical image and the category of performance?

Przemysław Wiatr's "In search of the Other – Vilém Flusser and dialogical life" discusses the way the philosophy of Vilém Flusser presents the subject of moral values. The essay looks at the ethical dimension in Flusser's philosophy focusing on the notion of dialogue, which could be seen as a possible solution to the existential, moral and social problems encountered by postmodernity. The essay is followed by a short summary of Wiatr's monograph *W cieniu posthistorii – wprowadzenie do filozofii Viléma Flussera* (In the Shadow of Post-History – Introduction to the Philosophy of Vilém Flusser) published in 2018.

Finally, in "From God's Death and Nothingness to the Re-Creation of the World: Vilém Flusser's Intertextual Games", Jan P. Hudzik deals with a series of motifs in Vilém Flusser's philosophy: the notion of nothingness, the question of "God's death", the overall ontological horizon, and establishment of being. The article aims to reconstruct the fundamentals of his theory of being, on the basis of the analysis of his fragmentary statements which form a coherent whole crowned with a utopian vision of information society.

Jan P. Hudzik, Lublin (Poland) April 2019