

Introduction

The current issue of *Flusser Studies* considers Flusser's first three years in Europe and focuses on Merano/Meran in northern Italy. There, Vilém and Edith spent the falls and winters between October 1972 and May 1975, reading and writing in a more or less quiet ambience. As Flusser wrote in a letter to Abraham Moles on December 4 1973 „All very well, but what should we be doing? My answer: stay put in Merano or a farmhouse near Strasbourg, write books and articles nobody will read, talk together about God and the world, and have a nice time as the fires are burning. I invite you to do this with us“.¹ However, this account of a time of rest and intellectual work cannot hide the evidence of considerable activity. During this time, Flusser published several essays in the leading German newspaper of Alto Adige/Südtirol in northern Italy, *Dolomiten*, and one article for *Das Fenster* of North Tyrol in Austria. These quickly brought him into a number of contemporary multilingual discussions.

The essays reprinted here date from that time in the early 1970s and make reference to the immediate context. It is worth noting that 1972 was exactly the year Alto Adige/Südtirol / South Tyrol (officially: Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano/ Autonome Provinz Bozen/Provincia Autonoma de Balsan/Bulsan) successfully adopted a policy of détente. As Flusser had several well-informed and educated friends in Italy, and as the Italian and German newspapers frequently reported on the issue, he must have known details of those developments.

The topic and timing of the issue coincide with the preparation of an exhibition, *Cultura in movimento. Merano 1965–1990/Kultur in Bewegung. Meran 1965–1990*, planned for the fall 2020. The exhibition, to take place at the public art gallery Kunst Meran/ Merano Arte with its managing director Herta Torggler <https://www.kunstmeranoarte.org>, is co-curated by Ursula Schnitzer and the editor of this issue of *Flusser Studies*, Markus Neuwirth. The catalogue will appear in German and Italian editions. In its 400 pages will include about 500 illustrations, in colour and black and white, and more than thirty essays. The catalogue

¹ Rainer Guldin, Gustavo Bernardo, “Vilém Flusser (1920–1991). Ein Leben in der Bodenlosigkeit. Biographie” Transcript, Bielefeld 2017, pp. 185-186; in the Brazilian edition: Gustavo Bernardo, Rainer Guldin, O homem sem chão. A biografia de Vilém Flusser, São Paulo: Annablume: 2017, p. 180.

focuses on the visual arts with special essays on artists, among them Mathias Schönweger, who furnished the drawings for Flusser's articles in the *Dolomiten*. While preparing an essay on the artist Gina Klaber Thusek, who was closely associated with the Flussers in Merano and visited them at Robion as well, Ursula Schnitzer discovered an archive of unpublished material related to Flusser, and has made the information in it available for *Flusser Studies 28* only. Siegfried de Rachewiltz, grandson of Ezra Pound,⁴ has contributed an essay on the artists, writers and cultural activities on Castel Fontana/Brunnenburg⁵ close to Castel Tirol/Schloss Tirol⁶ near Merano. Haroldo and Augusto de Campos visited the Castel Fontana in 1991. Anna Zinelli expands this framework with her essay *La Livre: An Homage to Ezra Pound di Francesco Conz*, which includes the de Campos brothers and the grupo *noigandres*.⁷ Several essays on history, music and other topics complete the overview on culture in Merano 1965 to 1990. An essay by Rainer Guldin relates Flusser's paired concepts of dialogue and discourse to the Flussers' life and movements between mountains - Merano - and plains - Robion over these years. This essay will be published in both the Italian and German editions of the exhibition catalogue, and is part of *Flusser Studies 28* as a preview. During the research for the catalogue, we learned that Flusser's assistant in São Paulo, the artist Gabriel Borba Filho, visited him in Merano and met the artist Gina Klaber Thusek. In this case, the strategy of investigation produced a win-win solution.

It was not easy for Vilém and Edith Flusser to find an appropriate place of residency in which to start a new life in Europe in 1972. One of the reasons⁸ to settle for a while in Merano, Italy may have been Franz Kafka's recreational stay to this spa town from April 3 to June 27, 1920.⁹ During his stay, he worked once more on the *The Trial/Der Prozeß* and wrote several penetrating letters to Milena Jesenská and to his sister Ottila. Being Jewish himself, he may well have sensed a resonance with other guests and the Jewish

⁴ See Mary de Rachewiltz, *Ezra Pound, Father and Teacher: Discretions*, (New York: NewDirections Paperback, [1975] 2005); Mary de Rachewiltz, *Diskretionen. Erinnerungen der Tochter Ezra Pounds*. Translated from the English by Gertrud Spat, (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1994).

⁵ The De Rachewiltz family are owners of the Castel Fontana.

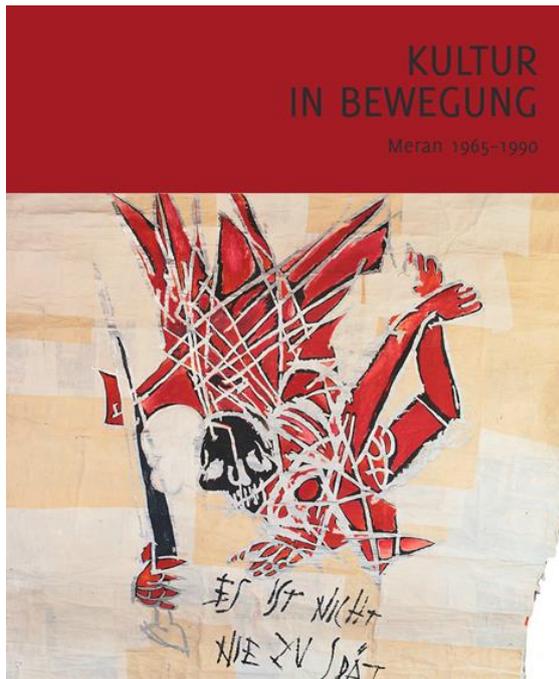
⁶ Siegfried de Rachewiltz was the director of the Museo storico-culturale della Provincia di Bolzano/ Südtiroler Landesmuseum für Kultur- und Landesgeschichte in Castel Tirol/Schloss Tirol between 1991 and 2014.

⁷ Markus Neuwirth, „Wiener Gruppe“ – Gomringer – „Grupo Noigandres“, in: *Mitteilungen der Carl Justi-Vereinigung E.V. Zur Förderung der kunstwissenschaftlichen Zusammenarbeit mit Spanien und Portugal* [Transactions of the Carl Justi Association for the Advancement of Cooperation between Spain and Portugal], Vol. 19 (2007), 115–137.

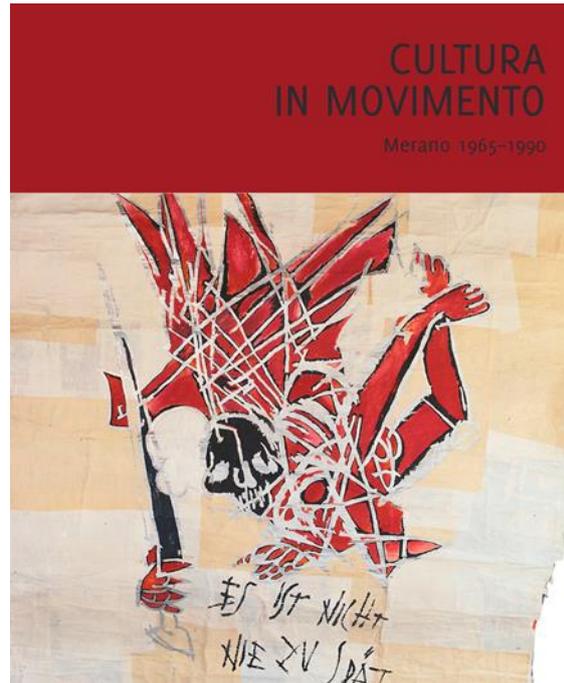
⁸ Guldin and Bernardo, „Vilém Flusser (1920–1991)“ 2017 (see note 1 above).

⁹ Ferruccio delle Cave, Bertrand Huber, *Meran im Blickfeld deutscher Literatur. Eine Dokumentation von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart*, Athesia, Bozen 1988, p. 100–112; Ferruccio delle Cave, *Südtirol. Ein literarischer Reiseführer*, Edition Raetia, Bozen/Bolzano 2011, p. 228–230.

community of Merano. Later this year, from April 19 to 21 there will be a conference on Kafka to mark the 100th anniversary of this stay. It will take place in the former Hotel Emma (today the school FOS Madame Curie), where Kafka spent the first – expansive – week of his stay. Rainer Stach will discuss his three-volume biography of Kafka. It is, at least, a happy coincidence that this issue on Flusser’s presence in Merano will appear so close to a conference on Kafka.



Cover of the catalogue *Kultur in Bewegung. Meran 1965–1990*, Markus Neuwirth and Ursula Schnitzer, eds, Kunstmeran Meranoarte, 2020; design based on a work of Franz Pichler „Es ist nicht nie zu spät“, 1984, 250 x110 cm.



Cover of the catalogue *Cultura in movimento. Merano 1965–1990*, Markus Neuwirth and Ursula Schnitzer, eds., Kunstmeran Meranoarte, 2020; design based on a work by Franz Pichler „Es ist nicht nie zu spät“, 1984, 250 x110 cm.

Another reason the Flussers may have chosen to live in Merano may have been its famous climate, as Flusser suffered from asthma. The small spa town boasts a curious combination of high, snowy mountains and palm trees. Fresh air, sunny weather, good, fresh food and high water quality would seem to guarantee improvements in health. A publication of 1837 by Johann Nepomuk Huber, personal physician of Princess Mathilde of Schwarzenberg, provoked a wave of ever-increasing interest in Merano.¹² With prominent doctors like

¹² Johann Nepomuk Huber, *Über die Stadt Meran in Tirol, ihre Umgebung und ihr Klima. Nebst Bemerkungen über Milch-, Molken- und Traubenkur*, Vienna: Strauß 1837.

Franz Tappeiner (1816–1902)¹³ and Raphael Hausmann (1837–1912) in the area,¹⁴ upper class guests, intellectuals, authors and artists were attracted to Merano for the quality of available medical care, in turn bringing economic growth in the second half of the 19th Century which can still be seen in architecture and urban structures. As a consequence, a diversity of national and religious communities, including Jewish, Lutheran, and Russian orthodox groups, developed successfully within a predominantly Catholic population.

Maybe the most interesting possible reason for Flusser's choice of Merano was the bilingual Italian-German character of everyday life in Merano. The population of the town divides more or less evenly between speakers whose mother tongue is Italian and those who are native German speakers. Many speak both fluently. Both types of schools exist with language cross over. Translation – basic to Flusser's existence, the way he saw and projected himself – is basic to everyday life in Merano as well. Two interesting examples, parallel careers of the same generation, can serve to illustrate. Ernst von Glasersfeld (1917–2010)¹⁵ and Valentin von Braitenberg (1926–2011)¹⁶ both grew up in the town Merano and in the county Alto Adige/Südtirol. Their shared experience of two languages is widely considered fundamental for their research strategies and intellectual lives. Both suffered under the Nazi and fascist regimes, and both argued vehemently against nationalism.

Last but not least, the Flussers may well have been attracted by the proximity of close friends in Trento and Malgolo (also Provincia autonoma di Trento, in the south of the Provincia autonoma di Bolzano. Bernardino Bagolini (1938–1995), prehistorian and geomorphologist who worked frequently in the Alps of Trento and Alto Adige/Südtirol may have exerted a particularly strong attraction. Bagolini interpreted archaeological discoveries at different altitudes to determine when and why populations settled and moved across the mountains. Flusser's texts of these years, especially for *Das Fenster* and for *Natural:mente*, make clear reference to discussions with Bagolini.

¹³ Ulrike Kindl/ Patrick Rina (eds.), Franz Tappeiner. Kurarzt und Mäzen – Medico e mecenate (1 Merabilia. Storia Meran/o Geschichte Palais Mammaing). Athesia, Bozen/Bolzano 2017.

¹⁴ Rosanna Pruccoli, Raphael Hausmann e Franz Tappeiner: Storia di una reciprocità, in: *ibid.*, p. 70–87.

¹⁵ Ernst von Glasersfeld, *Partial Memories. Sketches From an Improbable Life*, Imprint Academic: Exeter (UK) and Charlottesville (USA) 2009; Ernst von Glasersfeld, *Radical Constructivism: A Way of Knowing and Learning*, The Falmer Press: London 1995. German Language publication: *Radikaler Konstruktivismus. Ideen, Ergebnisse, Probleme*. Translated by K.Köck, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1997.

¹⁶ Valentin Braitenberg, *Vehicles. Experiments in Synthetic Psychology*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984; Valentin Braitenberg, *Il gusto della lingua: Meccanismi cerebrali e strutture grammaticali*, Merano: Alpha & Beta: 1996; Inga Hosp, Almut Schütz, Zeno Braitenberg (Hrsg.), *Tentakel des Geistes. Begegnungen mit Valentin Braitenberg*, (Arunda 81), Bozen/Bolzano: Edition Raetia, 2011.

The first part of the issue contains a series of texts that Flusser published in 1973-74 in local newspapers. The first six texts were published in *Dolomiten*: “Kerzengärten. Betrachtung vor einem Kunstwerk“ (Candle-Gardens. Considerations in front of a Work of Art) November 17-18, 1973) deals with the work of Regina Klaber Thusek.¹⁹

„Das Fernsehen näher gesehen“ (A closer Look at) Television (December 7 1973) discusses the television-set from a phenomenological point of view as a black box. „Kommentar“ (Commentary) (December 11 1973) is a short reflection on art exhibitions. „Die Tasche / strukturelle Analyse“ (The Bag / Structural Analysis) (December 15-16 1973) is a short essay on Flusser’s personal leather bag containing his different texts in a period of intellectual nomadism. „Bunte Reihe Berühmter Männer,, (Colourful Assembly of Famous Men) (March 9-10 1974) explores a series of famous men in view of changing concepts of fame and the rising importance of mass media. As “Das Fernsehen näher gesehen”, “Bunte Reihe Berühmter Männer” contain illustrations by Matthias Schönweger.²⁰ Finally, „Zwei Flüsse und zwei Strömungen“ (Two Rivers and Two Currents) (July 13 1974) discusses the results of the French presidential election of 1974 – in which Valéry Giscard d’Estaing won by a very close margin against François Mitterrand – from a geographical point of view. “Mein Tal in Südtirol“ (My Valley in South-Tyrol) was published in *Das Fenster* (1967-2001). It discusses Flusser’s life in Merano from a geographical and communicologic point of view.²¹ Besides Flusser’s essay, which is illustrated with pictures of the work of the architect Carl Pruscha, the present issue of *Flusser Studies* also contains Pruscha’s essay “Ein Tiroler plant und Bau in Nepal”.

In “Zwischen Berg und Ebene: Zur Entstehung von Vilém Flussers Begriffspaar Dialog/Diskurs - Tra montagna e pianura: come è nata la coppia di concetti dialogo/discorso di Vilém Flusser” (Between Mountain and Plain. On the Development of Vilém Flusser’s Conceptual Pair of Dialogue and Discourse), Rainer Guldin attempts a genealogic reconstruction of Vilém Flusser’s fundamental conceptual pair dialogue/discourse that he developed in the early 1970s. From 1973 to 1975, Edith and Vilém Flusser lived between Merano – where they generally spent the winter reading, discussing, taking walks and relaxing – and the Loire region in France where they spent the

¹⁹ See the contribution by Ursula Schnitzer in this issue of *Flusser Studies*.

²⁰ See his contribution in this issue of *Flusser Studies*.

²¹ See also the contribution by Rainer Guldin in this issue of *Flusser Studies*.

summers of 1973 and 1974. This nomadic existence between the mountain valley of Alto Adige/Südtirol and the plains of France prompted Flusser to develop a double vision of culture and communication based on two different geographical settings. Dialogues take place above all in valleys and discourses predominate in the plains. Between the two, there is a constant exchange that recalls Flusser's own existence in these years.

In „Regina Klaber Thusek und Vilém Flusser. Schönheit versus Hübschheit“ (Regina Klaber Thusek and Vilém Flusser. Beauty versus Prettiness), Ursula Schnitzer explores Vilém Flusser's friendship with the artist Regina Klaber Thusek (born 1900, Römerstadt, d. 1983, Merano) between 1973 and 1979. Like Flusser, Klaber Thusek had a circle of friends that was international, and that showed a propensity for people with Jewish roots whose lives had been shaped by the Holocaust. Klaber Thusek, who traced her Jewish background through her father, immediately felt an affinity with Flusser, the Prague Jew. They met for the most part in Merano at the time both were living there, although the friendship culminated in a trip to Provence in May 1979. This essay, which briefly narrates Klaber Thusek's life and her meeting with Flusser, is the result of several years of study of the artist's estate, now held at the archive of the Palais Maming Museum in Merano. It contains extracts from the artist's journal pertaining directly to Flusser. The last text is a letter to Regina Klaber Thusek that Vilém Flusser wrote on January 23 1976 in La Font Chaude in the South of France where they moved in 1975.²²

Finally, in his short contribution “Vilém Flusser”, Matthias Schönweger describes his first meeting with Edith and Vilém Flusser and their subsequent collaboration.²³

Markus Neuwirth (Innsbruck) and Ursula Schnitzer (Merano) December 2019

²² See also the contribution by Ursula Schnitzer in this issue of *Flusser Studies*.

²³ See „Das Fernsehen näher gesehen“ and „Bunte Reihe Berühmter Männer,“ in this issue of *Flusser Studies*.