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Vilém Flusser's Technical Image:
Performative Inspirations

The following considerations are placed at a particular moment in the history of man and media – at a time when media not only serve to communicate and exchange information but, above all, function as programmable algorithms and ways of organizing and experiencing the world. I situate this moment in postmodernity, a period in which in order to diagnose reality we need to launch instruments and conceptual structures that are no longer traditional and can be combined and in a synthesized form, and applied to media analyses – and vice versa. Among the many theories available today – that are at your fingertips thanks to the media: I focus on media and the performative turn, which combines many disconnected, dispersed methods and narratives. It is a reflection in which the research process can be described as a practice and its results as a live action – it is thus located in between the abstract and the practical dimension.

The purpose of this article is not to reconstruct Flusser's thoughts – the many relevant references are difficult to put in the precise form of a classical scientific article. Hence, this text is essayistic, performative in character, aspiring to be part of an unstable, medially dispersed and multidimensional modernity, which both Flusser and the performatics have often tried to recognize by renouncing existing intellectual conventions or conceptualization strategies.

In this spirit, I would like to try to answer the question whether Vilém Flusser can be called a performatic? In other words, can his thought be an important complement to performatics (also called performance studies), which is based on both the philosophy of language and anthropology, but equally on the study of theatrical phenomena and everyday practices? This task seems unfeasible in one short text, which is why I will only consider the possible kinship between Flusser's concept of technical image and the broad category of performance. In this sense, it will be a kind of theoretical experiment – I start with presenting my understanding of the technical image. I then try to position it within postmodernism and the performative turn, in order to create a probationary comparison of Flusser's concept with the relevant reflection of the most important researchers, here referred to as performatics.

1. Technical image

The concept of technical image formulated by Vilém Flusser may confuse a less sophisticated, or less demanding researcher. This is because we are dealing with a complete reformulation of the image theory: the world presented, and, more precisely, the world that consists of a composition of concepts (Flusser 2011: 10). These concepts – contained in a hybrid fusion of text and image – no longer refer to anything external, that is, they do not represent the world. Technical images, understood in the constructivist/performative spirit, are its presentation, manifestation, an enlivening of the imagination, which places us in a utopia, perceived as a journey towards a point without a clear reference (Flusser 2011: 3). Flusser, therefore, focuses our attention not only on how the images report our being-in-the-world, but also on how, and – most importantly – why images form the basis of our contemporary, always and inevitably mediated culture. It is in technical images that Flusser sees a culture-creating potential, where culture is primarily understood as communication (Flusser 2002: 4).

Technical images are, according to Flusser, not just new media, which we would understand as products of modern technology – according to the technological determinism dominating in many media-related discourses. Przemysław Wiatr, a Polish promoter and translator of Flusser's texts, explains that the technical image is a third degree of abstraction: it does not refer to reality, but to the text, "which in turn has its source in the traditional image, and this one is abstracted directly from reality" (Wiatr 2018b: 209). This means that technical images create a specific space, and at the same time separate – structurally – from reality, which they could potentially "describe". Thus, they are an intrinsic part of it, by programming or "projecting" meanings into the world (Wiatr 2018b: 211).

Technical images as effects/products of apparatuses (*apparatus*: I do not develop this concept here – it requires a separate study), by their nature "test" reality, they are experiments carried out on living organisms of social and cultural relations. The use of these devices is both an extension of the human body (not only the elusive senses, but also the whole of human existence), and it dominates the user – in Flusser: an apparatus functionary or techno-imaginator. The techno-imaginator differs from the imaginator himself in what they do with the use of the apparatus: the former designs technical images, the latter – traditional images. The functionary is a passive person, somehow forced to perform programmed actions, performed according to the technical instructions of the machine. This thread is connected both with the thought of Marshall McLuhan and with the investigations of Jean Baudrillard – in the Polish philosophical and media discourse this issue is creatively developed by Piotr Zawojski (2012: 40).

By contrast, the apparatus in the hands of the techno-imaginator in a way simulates/replicates human thinking (Flusser 1984: 53), which in turn directs our attention to the independence – and therefore a certain subjectivity – of the very things: media machines. The technical image is a mutual vibration of the human imagination and the algorithm, according to which the media machine functions and the techno-imaginator is not just another function of the apparatus (*manual*).

The technical image does not have one exhaustive definition. Flusser did not create a typology of individual technical images, but each of the examples he cited – mainly from the areas of photography, video, film, television, etc. – constituted a specific kind of a much more extensive category. Flusser regarded individual technical images as single point, assembled particles of light and screen pixels, and put the peculiarities of the surrounding contexts into the phenomenological parenthesis. In this way, he directed our attention to the technical image itself, and therefore to visualization considered as a new way of human thinking, and the next step on the path of civilization. This way of thinking is not abstract, but physical: in Flusser's conception, the humanistic tradition and the exact sciences are combined, for example by introducing the category of entropy into the conceptual grid (Flusser 1984: 35). The space of human imagination and the world of machines, physics and mathematics merge, lead together to a redefinition of social history and re-program the human condition.

However, as we have said before, Flusser's technical image should not be identified only with technology – behind it there is a whole range of other tests and experiments belonging to the world of science, human products/meanings, for which "objectivity or neutrality – according to Wiatr – is only a questionable hypothesis" (Wiatr 2018b: 220).

Flusser was far from trusting in technique, his attitude towards it was – just like once Marx's attitude – suspicious. Therefore, the technical image is such a manner of visual thinking and coming into existence, which allows for overcoming technicalities, marking the elements of reality in a way opposite to reading them – giving them meanings, creating events and happenings, through their presence in the technical image (Flusser 2013: 101–102). Technology and technical products themselves do not have access to "objective" reality. In this situation, according to Flusser, a salvation, or rather the only way to be-in-the-world is to "write" it again and again, rather than to read the ideologized meanings from it. It is basically a humanization of what is technically separated and at the same time an incentive to act, to write and depict the world, performing gestures that have a causative and therefore a performative character. Gestures and images both allow a man to become "a virtual artist, and a virtual Zen monk, and a virtual prophet" (Flusser 2014: 134). This means that thanks to the gestures that create technical images we can change our thinking. We can make a turn from the dialectical and cause-and-effect order

of reality, to the irrational, but not necessarily absurd: for Flusser, the natural world without any media is absurd, and communication is our only dignity (Wiatr 2018b: 137–138), and therefore abstract and mediating one. Mediating, and therefore specific, for example concretizing the absurd photons that attack us, which also, thanks to the operation of the apparatus allows us to assemble the disintegrating, postmodern world (Flusser 2002: 114). Irrationality refers us here to the experience of a world devoid of a rational basis and foundations, and in this sense – to the experience of nothingness, emptiness, which emerges from under the rational (scientific) images of the world. Such an experience – to use the existentialist's favorite phrase – is therefore doomed to designing (one of Flusser's favorite concepts), programming the world, which bears the hallmarks of creating it. This approach to individual, but also social, imagination directs us towards postmodernism.

2. Postmodernity and the performative turn

Postmodernity will include what used to be known as fluid and non-permanent, defined with the prefix "post" – thus: post-humanism, post-politics, post-history, post-media, etc. "Post" refers to dynamics, movement – not only to change *in toto* – and signifies de-autonomization of theory, drawing attention to various practices of producing meanings, but also producing actions. It is in those 'posts' that a deeply rooted question is stuck, not only about the symptoms of the reality understood in multiple ways, but about its ways of functioning, the causes that regulate and govern its mechanisms.

In recent years, both in the scientific discourse – culture, sociology, political science, media science – as well as in everyday discourse, we can observe stronger and stronger voices which postulate directing our vigilance not only onto the meaning and semantic relations (relations between text and technique, discursiveness and symbolism, their performative presence in everyday life), but onto the expressive dimension of action. Doris Bachmann-Medick talks about the "practical analysis of performance centered on the experimental, instrumental, pragmatic and discursive aspects of the scientific production of symbols, on representation as a cultural activity" (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 121). When we try to give meaning to everything that is human, we will turn to fundamental questions and will often criticize the modernity we experience and the questions about our individual and community role in reality shaping will become more and more important.

Criticism of culture or ideology leads to placing further direction indicators on the path towards the understanding of human existence (including the role and function of human products). One of the basic philosophical traditions in which such debates are currently

conducted is the hermeneutic tradition, with such authors as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt. They have both accurate critics and prolific followers – in their philosophizing style rather than in the substantive sense – namely the poststructuralists, like Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze or Jacques Derrida. They are in turn criticised by Bruno Latour, who develops the Nietzschean and Foucaultian theme of the "death" of both God and man, assumes their style of analysis and plots the birth of what-is-inhuman. We shall certainly include Vilém Flusser in this honorable group.

Let us stop here for a moment and consider the notions of performatics and performance. Performatics is defined by Richard Schechner – one of its founding fathers – as an interdisciplinary study of social behaviors, including those understood as artistic practices, with an occasional use of participatory observation. The definition allows it to be regarded a discipline of social practices and strategies. This means that performatics draws from a wide range of other disciplines and synthesizes their approach. Therefore, we shall not define performance studies as reading cultural texts, but rather an action in which "one inquires about the behaviour of, for example, a painting: how, when, and by whom was it made, how it interacts with those who view it, and how the painting changes over time" (Schechner 2013: 1). The sources of performatics can be found in studies on theatre and drama, cultural studies and language philosophy. The conclusions drawn there, and completed in "pure" disciplinary research, will be the beginning of further analyses and will serve as useful analytic categories for both theoretical and empirical studies (Loxley 2006: 140).

The creator of the concept of "performativity" John Langshaw Austin pointed out already in the 1960s, that when uttering a performative statement one is *doing* something rather than just *saying* something. For example, during the wedding ceremony, by saying "yes", we not only declare marrying someone, but change our, as well as the other person's, social status. What is more, under the divine and human law, we become a family. Thus, the performativity of language does not refer to any "truth" – it does not report reality and does not sustain the status quo – but it creates it (Austin 1962: 4–11). In other words, language fulfils a performative function: a given statement is always somewhat causative and introduces a new order in the relevant reality. Speaking is an action in itself, however, not all statements can be classified as feasible actions, and some of their effects will be impossible to plan – if we employ the cause-and-effect conclusion process. The one who speaks always acts, and thus creates (or at least changes) reality. He is a performer because "in ordinary life, in a ritual, at play, or in the performing arts [*the performer always* – M.S.] does or shows something – performs an action" (Schechner 2013: 30).

„Performativity – according to Schechner – as understood by performance studies, is part of, or closely related to, postmodernism. One of the decisive qualities of postmodernism is the

application of the *performance principle* to all aspects of social and artistic life" (Schechner 2013: 129). Performance then – in simplest terms – is any kind of practices/discourses that are not only imitative or creative, but also somewhat imperative. This means that the concept of performance refers to presenting – or acting – something that is not just a simple continuation or a consequence of some other actions or practices, nor simply doing something new. This concept also refers to the development and complementation of other activities, but is also able to turn against them – because a performative act itself is never stable. Performance so outlined would be strongly coincident with the Foucaultian concept of discourse, which is realized in the form of ephemeral everyday discourses and permanent discourses about the potential of change (Foucault 1981: 51–76).

Parallel to the works of Schechner (but also Flusser), a gradual departure from the analysis of all kinds of cultural products becomes evident in the 1980s, in favour of a rich reflection on acting understood as the effects of "the existence of things." Bruno Latour, among others, can certainly be regarded a founding father of that turn which redirects the focus of research to not only human causative potential. Latour's actor-network theory (ANT) mainly deals with this issue: causative, creative, independent – all the items that are involved in a given act, understood as a process and its "effects" (Latour 2000). The subject/actor, recognised as the acting one, is insufficient as such to build his/its own subjectivity. The meaning of the subject is then determined by the sum of himself/itself and his/its effects. Thus, only by including them in the concept (metaphor or act), gain materiality and explicative potential, just like laboratory experiments. This connotation allows us to "tear" the subject of research off the "classical" disciplines (such as theatre studies, linguistics, and political science or media studies) and understand it as a material fact, resulting and resultant of the creation, negation, negotiation or institutionalization processes.

The performance, which will include the phenomena of our everyday experience, is a concept, which aims to explain the state of the present culture – sometimes called postmodern culture – which is characterized by constant modifications and transformations of content, ideas, practices, discourses – particularly in the form of a visualization and imaging. Therefore, the departure from the linear, idealizing, but always the universal perception of the world, towards the dispersed, fragmented and heterogeneous practices that make up the sum of the everyday experience of reality, becomes important.

The image then, as an exemplification of visibility, refers to the body, emotions, imagination and unification of what is classically understood as content and form. It means that the image "does not talk" with other signs, things, objects or subjects, but absorbs them and accepts them as its own, "inscribes" them into its own structure. The image perceived as a

performance is, in other words, a "paradigm of process" (Schechner 1987: 8). This means that the image in the performative approach is never completed – it is a work in progress, a material being, but nevertheless fleeting, always perfecting itself and being perfected.

Producing an image understood as a practice/discourse will be a kind of a creation of being. It will no longer mean only actions understood as creative acts, contained in aesthetic or artistic creations. They will be all kinds of micro-creations of everyday life in the form of self-justifying performatives (statements of a causative power from outside the language scope) and actions, which will be called performances (Schechner 2013: 168). Performativity then extends to all forms of expression, understood as communication activities – not only to performatives themselves. It is then assumed that language is generally performative. The performative turnaround in contemporary humanities places us in such a social and cultural reality in which both language and reality itself are things, which have been produced (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 73–101).

However, one cannot narrow the understanding of performatics to a kind of constructivism. Performatics also opens up the possibility of analyzing the phenomena that somehow do not fit into a linguistic, textual or visual research tradition. These will be causality, action, participation in the process of change – not only human, but also non-human processes. The change should be understood in three dimensions. First of all, the metaphor of the world as a text is not sufficient to analyse the complexity of such issues as technological progress, multiculturalism or globalization. Secondly, changes take place in the operating actor and its surroundings as a result of events produced by individuals/communities/institutions, mainly in the form of images and technologies. Thirdly, the change today is the harmony and cooperation of people and their products (including images), where the latter obtain subjectivity on the basis of the recognition of their causality.

3. Flusser and performatics – imaginations and interpretations

For both Flusser's theory and performatics, the starting point will always be the language. In Flusser's thought the technical image is the next version, or function of a text, whose task is no longer just to disenchant images. To disenchant them means to deprive them of the causative power, understood as reading, or interpreting, the reality that surrounds us, on the basis of the elements of reality, which are imagined and included in them. A text opposes a two-dimensional (both real and imaginary) traditional image – it frees it from being a carrier of magical or religious references, which lead to the phenomena of idolatry (image of a deity as the object of worship) and iconoclasm (prohibition of God's images). Today, the written language – a text transformed

into a technical image – has the task of programming reality again, making it a world of images (for example photographic ones). According to Flusser, the struggle with "textolatria" (the divine power of the word) begins with the first apparatuses.

This is also the beginning of post-history, the end of linear events, understood in positivist and enlightenment terms, described in cause-and-effect categories (Flusser 1984: 9, 12). The referential function of language thus changes into a performative one, and no longer refers signs to the externally agreed truth, but establishes a new, techno-graphic ontology (Hudzik 2017: 355–374). This is an additional explanation of why the technical image is the beginning of post-history, of the dispersed, non-linear, fluid relations, tangled, and rhizomatic events. Flusserian post-history is a differently formulated postmodernity – or even "postmodernity plus", because post-history (the era of the apparatus and technical images) can basically be compared only with prehistory (the epoch of traditional images), and history (the epoch of writing) (Wiatr 2018b: 266–275). It is also a necessity to behave in an "operational" or IT-like manner: focused on the control over the context, where „performance improvement won at the expense of the partner or partners constituting that context" (Lyotard 1984: 46–47).

3.1. Performative interactive games?

This is nothing more than a game in which the stake is the meaning of what is real. Flusser would argue here with the potentially emerging division between winners and losers. He would see this game as an intertextual way to dialogue – which, however, does not deprive the actual actions of the characteristic game of illusion and imagination, particular only to them. Performativity forces media users to include spiritual, fictional, imaginary, metaphysical and transcendental references in their argumentative repertoire – just as in the universe of technical images we deal with imaginators (*envisioners*): "People who try to turn an automatic apparatus against its own condition of being automatic. They cannot create illusions without the automatic apparatus, for the stuff to be envisioned, the particles, are neither visible nor graspable nor comprehensible without the apparatus's keys. But they can't turn the envisioning over to the automatic apparatus either, for the technical images produced in such a way would be redundant, that is, predictable, uninformative situations from the standpoint of the apparatus's program" (Flusser 2011: 19–20).

Technical images interpreted as performances become important here as long as we take into account their normative power with a potential for change, revealed in everyday life. . There, in this part of man's being and acting, ideologies founded on the so-called epistemological assumptions are of marginal importance. Negotiations are at the forefront – they are present not

only in a dialogical form, commonly understood as a conversation – covering issues of communication between individuals and institutions, all kinds of information visualizations and media activities (both "traditional" and "new" media), in the form of various observations and stagings. The techno-imaginator simultaneously observes and stages the reality, although he does not know what is really happening in the interior/software of the apparatus, which he uses to create and read technical images.

Similarly, a performer, as described by another American performatic Jon McKenzie, operates on the threshold of his own corporeality and electronic (and even biomedical) ontologies. Today, „words and gestures, statements and behaviors, symbolic systems and living bodies are being recorded, archived, and recombined through multimedia communication networks" (McKenzie 2001: 94). It means that technical images are the performances of post-history – they are just postmedia: "assemblages connecting the visual with the material, the analogue with the digital, the virtual with the real, the semiotic with the biological" (Celiński 2016: 198).

3.2. The imaginary world or the life-world?

Flusser sees and understands media as a path towards a free society, as a return to the life-world – both the imagined and the material one – that we have lost, focusing on texts. The imaginary world, thanks to technical images (thanks to media – thanks to performances) can become a life-world through the mediation between text and technology, symbols and machines. A representative of such a society – the already mentioned techno-imaginator – is an ideal type, formed by communing with the apparatus and technical images. He is abstracted (detached) from the phenomena irrelevant to conceptual generalization. Just as Flusser gives meaning to technical images, so does he see the possibility of giving meaning to everyone and everything, which thus appears to be significant and not an absurd. It is a new way of thinking, in which media information does not mean reporting something, but establishing a certain being. Let us give voice to Flusser in this matter: "The current interaction between images and human beings will lead to a loss of historical consciousness in those who receive the images and, as a result, also to a loss of any historical action that could result from the reception of the image. But this current interaction is not yet leading to the development of a new consciousness, unless it changes radically, unless the feedback is interrupted and images begin to mediate between people. Such a rupture of the magical circle between image and person is the task we face, and this rupture is not only technically, but above all existentially possible. For images are beginning to bore us, in spite of the contract we have with them. The traffic between images and people is the central problem

of a society ruled by technical images. It is the point where the rising so-called information society may be restructured and made human" (Flusser 2011: 60).

Textual information can, therefore, thanks to this interaction with the imaginative potential of technology, magically change man's social way of being. What is imagined can come true thanks to the new biotechnical ontology – this transformed imaginary world has a chance to become a life-world, and therefore materially and transcendentally real.

The performatics have similar intuitions in this matter. Philip Auslander, considering the phenomenon of "liveness", that is the biotechnological and conceptual "here and now" of all media performances, notes the intense combination of imagination and real life: "The imaginary developing around interactive computer technologies also entails an ideology of liveness whose source lies in our interaction with the machine itself rather than the connections to the outside world permitted by it" (Auslander 2008: 62).

The interaction of the machine and man is therefore also a paradigm of performance studies – certainly Flusser would agree with Auslander's statement. Auslander's "liveness" would most likely be interpreted as an "access to deeper insights into brain function and telematic technologies, […] specifically on the basis of a circuitry that does justice to the interaction among brain functions. […] In this way, decisions would be reached all over the web and, as in the brain, would be integrated into a comprehensive decision, a consensus" (Flusser 2011: 92–93).

Performatics are slightly less optimistic here, less utopian. But performance does not always need to have a utilitarian purpose – practising performances is often just a challenge to the world, experimenting, the effects of which we will not always be able to foresee, but we will not read them critically any more: "not only as an activity to question and negate, but also as a performance *that can and must be affirmed*" (McKenzie 2001: 234). The imaginary world thus becomes here a life-world, which itself justifies the sense of being a human being, and as such does not need critical interpretations any more.

3.3. Dialogues, discourses or performances?

For Flusser, dialogues are forms of communication that generate information – they therefore form and shape the production of original things through their authors. Discourses, in turn, are the rules according to which information spreads, but also disperses. In this respect, the performance theory remains somewhat helpless: performatics will not distinguish between these two "orders". They will be regarded as one and the same process, constantly renewable, reincarnating both the sign and meaning. This is specifically explained by the performance theorist Peggy Phelan, who refers to Freudian psychoanalysis: „it is not so much that the dialogue

produces the symptom's meaning, but rather the dialogue creates a stage upon which the symptom's meaning can be amplified" (Phelan 1996: 168). She understands discourses as a propagation of meanings that distracts us from the real thing. As a result, for Phelan, a performance is a „representation without reproduction, can be seen as a model for another representational economy, one in which the reproduction of The Other as The Same is not assured" (Phelan 1996: 3). According to Phelan, performativity is a completely individual matter, which – although it outlines a certain general theory – is probably difficult to transfer onto the whole of social relations.

Nevertheless, also here Flusser will find a solution. He perceives the progressive individualization of social relations in a different way than most dystopian diagnostics, for whom media represent a collapse of culture and degradation of society: "The young Californians who sit in isolation at their computer terminals with their backs to one another have no social awareness. They belong to no family and identify with neither nationality nor class. From a nonideological, that is, phenomenological perspective, it is possible to recognize the appearance of the new social connective tissue. It is possible to recognize the threads that bind these new people to the senders of technical images. It becomes clear that we are dealing not with an asocial person but with one who is very profoundly socialized, although in a new sense. In fact, we are dealing with people who are so completely socialized that we justifiably fear for their individuality, despite their apparent isolation. The scattering into isolation appears here as the flip side of the coin *Gleichschaltung* – political alignment" (Flusser 2011: 63–64). Flusser justifies the sense of technical images again, through their power to give birth to new social relations (eluding a critical reading).

A description of this new sense of socialization is also being attempted by the performatics. For McKenzie performances are a new way to achieve social utopias through the categories of efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness. These concepts, however, are very modernistic. Despite the attempts to assign them to performative strategies, they always refer to the utopian goal, as defined by the founders of modernity. The goal is a wholesome success of mutual geopolitical, economic and technological relations. In spite of McKenzie's emphasis on the new quality that performatics brings to academic discourse, understood as a place where meanings are created, as well as all its material resources (books, lecterns, libraries, catalogues, etc.), programming the future is impossible for performatics (McKenzie 2001: 22).

McKenzie's (2001: 5–9) grouping of performances into organizational, cultural and technical ones is embedded in the tradition of a modernist, linear discursive order, in which one thing follows from the other – and the story he tells begins after the Second World War. Flusser, on the other hand, offers a much broader perspective: the story of the universe of technical images begins in the period of biblical paradise that is millions of years ago – hence the claim regarding

the future of humanity seems to lie within its reach. The future of man is the phase of technical images in which there are no external references: to pixels, elementary particles of the computer code – there is no mediation any more.

3.4. Dialogical path to freedom?

Flusser's concept goes far beyond the dichotomous social relations. The universe of technical images signifies a telematic society. According to Przemysław Wiatr, telematics (a neologism created from the combination of the notions of telecommunications and informatics) is a new social organization of reality for Flusser, which is supposed to enable universal dialogue (Wiatr 2018b: 331). However, it is not the technical aspect that is of interest to Flusser. Dialogicality returns to the foreground, which appears also in the texts of the performatics, although, as we shall soon see, in a completely different way. Contemporary times, in which media are often attributed with a dialogical, and thus revolutionary, potential, Flusser describes as follows: "We have probably never been so incapable of predicting the immediate future. Every revolution has paralyzed its victims and rendered them blind, for example, the aristocracy in the French Revolution or the Jews under Nazism. But the telematic revolution affects the whole society, not just part of it. And so even those who have set it in motion can't see where it's going. It is not from fear that we close our eyes to the immediate future; rather we do so because we cannot confront the triumph of the images that flood over us, and that we ourselves now partly produce. This triumph does not frighten us; on the contrary, it awakens a feeling of emptiness. Obviously we're happy that things like work, politics, and art (in short, history in the traditional sense) have no future. We are happy to get rid of all those things that restrict us. […] Even our arguments are empty chatter (e.g., as can be seen in pseudo- dialogue such as parliamentary debates or so-called negotiations between employers and unions). The telematically drawn, dialogic threads will carry no conversations but only empty chatter. And the more they may seem to bring us together, the more they will disperse us into isolated individuals who have nothing to say to one another. They will grind those human bonds such as love and friendship, but also hate and antagonism, down into empty chatter. And although the threads appear to be dialogic, they will in fact make all dialogue superfluous, redundant —hence the feeling of emptiness" (Flusser 2011: 82–83).

Flusser does not see our future in a traditional democratic form, although both in the deliberative and agonistic conception a dialogue is considered the basis of the formation of democracy, the system as well as the doctrine. Dialogical-discursive relations in the universe of technical images are designed in a different way here – communication sciences understood in

this way are also shaped differently. Thanks to the use of technical images we will not have to strive for dialogue, but we will ourselves become dialogical.

Dialogical mediation appears in the concept of performative democracy, which Elżbieta Matynia – its author – understands as "alternatives to violent solutions and despair" (Matynia 2009a). The mediality of performance according to Matynia applies to the daily activities of individuals in technical forms, drawing on the spectacle and with strong features of a game and/or play. These performative discourses – such as the use of new media for political mobilizations – are to transform the ideal of the sovereign into the real shaping of democracy in the form of activities saturated with stories and cultures. However, Matynia's conception seems somewhat naïve – as the researcher's approach to the causative powers of individuals is too idealistic, opposing them to the hegemony of state power imposed from the outside, in principle an oppressive power. In performative democracy, Matynia utopianly models individual applications (practices) of speech acts. She perceives them as the implementation of locally shaped attitudes that will constitute the possibility of sounding individual voices in a dialogue with the discourse of the machine of power (Matynia 2009b).

Flusserian technical images are an area of possibilities. There are some responses (disagreements) to the current state of our culture, which blocks man's freedom and places him in "an iron cage of rationality". Freedom here means distraction and founding the meaning of life on the "cybernetic structure" (Flusser 1984: 51) instead of the "linear structure of development". This leads to totalitarianisms on the one hand, and on the other to the enslavement of man by his own technical creations.

Performatics remains silent on the subject. A few Flusserian-type diagnoses appear in the work of Diana Taylor. In the context of man's pursuit of freedom she treats performativity as transculturation: a path to the abolition of all boundaries (*limenas*), in a specific situation in which "we realized that while we had formally abandoned the subject of transculturation we were all transculturated and transculturators. We came to speak of ourselves as 'double-agents' and 'go-betweens'" (Taylor 1994: 2). Therefore, Taylor incorporates new meanings into the performative repertoire of human behaviours: concepts which define the new condition of the community, realized in creative, artistic and media acts. They are, in fact, medially transcultural acts, that is those in which human expression is no longer limited by one cultural code; those in which different cultures are inscribed in a given medium or one activity. She describes performers as mediators against "centuries of discrimination and cultural imperialism" (Taylor 1994: 3).

An American performatic Judith Butler speaks in a similar vein. She links the social dimension of man's corporeality with his medially conditioned appearance in public space (Butler 2015: 102–103). She equates contemporary and future human freedom with media technologies,

which have not only the ability to inform (here: report), but also the potential for freedom. She takes up the issue of the emergence of a new social space through media, in which it is possible to broaden the material bodily dimension of a given action. Butler separates the individual's actions from informing about them. However, she states that the body cannot be separated from the technology it uses and adds the spatial context. Because a specific (a kind of rational) placement of an action is now impossible as it constantly establishes itself and exceeds an individual and a locality. In contrast, she regards such media images as modern, which without our explicit consent and permission have an ethical aspect. For Butler, performativity is a maximization of visibility, which goes beyond the space where bodies "physically" act – for example on a square or a street – to the media space in which they become widely and publicly visible.   At the same time, they are free from any dependence on political or technological power. So the performatics' attempts to obtain Flusserian openness to the media and technical images are discernible – but still in some way (ideologically?) limited, although full of utopian hopes for a better future for man.

Summary

Vilém Flusser's thought goes far beyond any defined and recognized traditions and research concepts. Thus, his work – sparkling with erudite, unobvious associations – can be part of a wide scope of performance studies. The universe of technical images does not create a model (as with performatics), but it opens the social space understood in this way (in the field of action and imagination), which leads to the possibility of returning to the life-world. It is not only a Flusser's theoretical postulate, but – as the media reality shows clearly today – the next step of man on the path of evolution.

In many places Flusser's insightful diagnoses are consistent with the performative recognition of postmodern times, but they certainly cannot be closed in and limited to performatics – for example, the technical image limited to the concept of performance. Performative additions to Flusser's thought can be treated as supplementary justifications and explanations of his concept. In accordance with his intention, Flusser's theory is to be understood as an open project. Therefore, performance studies may be regarded as additional branches, nomadic clues, and further surprising combinations. They will be a valuable complement, a response to Flusser's "invitation for the reader to co-create it actively" (Wiatr 2018a: 387).

Therefore, I may formulate a few conclusions. First of all, Flusser's philosophy can – and should – become a valuable complement to performatics. Secondly, his understanding of the media has the potential to enable the performatics to deepen the reflection on mediality, by

emphasizing the complementary nature of the material and the imaginary. Thirdly, Flusserian understanding of social relations, where dialogue and freedom finally gain a possibility of their realization, can become important and inspiring for performatics.

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