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Flusser, music and me

With this text, I intend to present the facts that made me dedicate a Music Cycle (still incomplete) to Vilém Flusser. Therefore, this is not an academic essay, and I consider it more as a musical program, written especially for this edition of Flusser Studies.

I definitely do not intend, in my compositions, to translate the philosophy of Flusser in a musical way. With the music that I have dedicated, in a very simple way, to his memory, I want to thank and share the poetic and beautiful way that Flusser made clear to me in Philosophy, in being Brazilian, and an immigrant.

While I was still living in Brazil, I had never heard about Flusser's name. The first time that I heard the name of Vilém Flusser, was through Brazilian philosopher Olavo de Carvalho's show on Talk Radio. On the show he talked about the people that left Brazil during the 70s, because of the military dictatorship, he mentioned Flusser's name very quickly, in the middle of a phrase, and somehow I became curious about this name: I wasn't even sure how to spell it, but I immediately searched for more information on internet.

That was in the beginning of 2012, and at that time I had already been living in Munich, Germany, for three years. On one of my internet searches I found: *Vilém Flusser - Fenomenologia do brasileiro*. This titled looked interesting to me, and so I decided that I should read what a Czech philosopher had to say about Brazil, and even more about the phenomenology of the Brazilian... At that point, I didn't know anything about Flusser, even less that he wasn't really Czech, or that he wasn't really Brazilian, and that he had no borders at all.

As a musician, I guess that what impresses me so much about Flusser is that his writing flows like sound, like music: bringing out the deepest of meanings in a very poetic way. I read "*Fenomenologia do Brasileiro*" a couple days before flying to Oslo, where I would have a premiere for my Boreal Children piece, written for a wind instruments orchestra. At that point, I still needed to review some instrumentation aspects of my composition, but after reading Flusser I could no longer take Flusser out of my mind. It was a mixture of feelings: I could not get Flusser out of my mind, nor the way he explained Brazil, in such a majestic and new way.

An avalanche of Flusser fell on me: at the Bayerisches Stadtbibliothek in Munich, I took out many of his books at the same time, in Portuguese and German. I started leafing through them, looking for something that I really did not even know what it could be. At the time, I had so many things to worry about: my Master's Degree in Composition in Nürnberg, the money I

should make to fly to Norway (at that time I wasn't a KAAD Fellow) and of course composing and studying conducting. The only thing I could feel was that with time, reading Vilém Flusser would make more and more sense for me as musician, and as a Brazilian with European origins living in Germany. I took the book "*Brasilien oder die Suche nach dem neuen Menschen: Für eine Phänomenologie der Unterentwicklung*" with me to Oslo, and in a very unprofessional manner, I spent more time reading the book than concentrating on the music that would be played there...(although that was not a problem as the music was almost 100% complete).

After a couple of days in Oslo I got an e-mail from my conducting Professor, Guido R. Rumstadt, asking if I had time to compose something new for our Orchestra Week in Marienbad. I already had plenty of things to do, but even so, I checked about Marienbad and that it is actually in the Czech Republic (at that time I had not yet discovered Goethe's Marienbad Elegy...). Anyway, I decided to compose a homage to Flusser (I was already reading "Língua e Realidade"), and that I would pay tribute to him by enforcing the power of words in my music. I had a very simple idea, which I thought would offer me a lot of musical material: an instrumental piece with a palindrome as a title. I started by searching for one: on the bus, in the subway, walking, in Norwegian, German, and Portuguese words... It was not that easy. So these are the facts: a) at that point in Oslo, I had no money to my name, b) Oslo is not the cheapest place in the world, c) I had to write a new piece for an orchestra in 2 weeks, and d) I had the strange feeling that Flusser's writings would at least help me with the music. From these four topics, what kind of palindrome could emerge? While I was in the Library I had the idea of an 7/8 ostinato that I could not get out of my mind (I had a serious problem getting things out of my mind) and so I decided that this would be part of the music that would be played to honour Flusser. "Seven" in Portuguese is "Sete" and as a lot people know, seven is a cabalistic number. It Has plenty of meanings: there are seven the days in the week, seven is made of four (the physical elements: water, fire, earth, and air) plus three (The Holy Trinity), there are seven musical notes, in the old Testament there were seven plagues in Egypt, and so on.

Therefore, I decided that this would be the fundamental element for my palindrome. I started to write down the number seven in Portuguese and to look for possibilities. And then it came to me: "*O Sete Teso*". In Portuguese *teso* means *rigid, stiff*. It comes from the Latin *tensus*. We also use it in Portuguese as an expression that means when man has no money, so the man is *teso*. From this, I started to compose using all of these fantasy elements of "*O Sete Teso*" in my mind. "*O Sete Teso*" is the first track you will hear in this edition of Flusser Studies.

I was lucky to be able to conduct the premiere of "*O Sete Teso*" in Marienbad. For me that was a kind of "thank you very much" from Vilém Flusser. I know Flusser's work outside of the

academic world, but feel very comfortable having a very open relationship with his philosophy and personality.

On August 2012, I was asked to conduct the Sorocaba Symphony Orchestra in Brazil, and for that I had the chance to compose a new orchestral piece. Therefore, I decided to start a Flusser Cycle with a new piece dedicated to him. After reading “*A História do Diabo*”, I found the palindrome: “O medo do Demo”, which translates as “Fear of the Devil” or “Devil’s fear”. After conducting the second concert in Sorocaba an old lady came to me, to tell me that she use to attend Flusser’s lectures at USP, and that she was always marvelled by him. In her words, she said that Flusser was unique, and for her a kind of intermediary of God. That impressed me a lot as I did not know Flusser personally.

Finally, this year a very good friend of mine wrote me a long e-mail thanking me for having introduced her to the figure and the work of Vilém Flusser: she was absolutely enthusiastic about it and attended the classes of Prof. Dr. Erick Felinto at UERJ in Rio de Janeiro. (I was also in Rio in March 2014 and attended one of Prof. Felinto’s classes, being very warmly received - on that day they talked about Flusser and cybernetics).¹

The day after I received the thank you e-mail from my friend, Rodrigo Maltez Novaes wrote to me asking me if I would like to contribute to this edition of Flusser Studies. Everything seemed to be absolutely orchestrated. One of Vilém Flusser’s jokes.

Flusser writes, in one of his essays about music that: “through music we see the structures of our lives”. Studying Flusser I comprehend a lot more about harmony, form and orchestration in music. And vice-versa, music does help me to understand some structures of life, as Flusser said – and it was music that brought me to Vilém Flusser.

¹ an interesting transcript Prof. Felinto’s lecture about Cybernetic and Flusser is available on <http://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/felinto-pensamento.pdf>