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Drafting the Techno-Imagination: A Future for Literary Writing?

The title may sound like a contradiction. To speak of literary texts in connection with the techno-imagination runs contrary to what Flusser's media philosophy is so well known for: the end of writing, and with it, the end of history. The subtitle of *Die Schrift* (and the main title of the English translation), for example, asks rhetorically, “*Does Writing Have A Future?*” (2002 and 2011). The book's essays answer with an elaborate “No.” Flusser explains in detail how all the different forms of writing, from headlines over books to signatures, are going to be redundant sooner or later. He insists that technically-produced images are already in the process of replacing the alphabet as the dominant code of communication and that this trend cannot be reversed. An earlier essay is ostentatiously entitled “Farewell to Literature”: “To the same degree to which the new digital codes will increasingly imitate the structure of the brain's nerve receptors will thinking set itself increasingly free from the predominance of language. [...] In such a situation, it would be ridiculous to keep on wanting to produce literature. We gradually have to learn to say farewell to it.” (1986: 901, my translation)

Flusser uses the term “literature” in the widest sense of the word, referring to all written texts. Naturally, he includes literature in the narrower sense of fiction and poetry in his premonitions. In *Does Writing Have A Future?*, he imagines a kind of poetry that would be detached from alphabetic writing and include painting or cooking as poetic activities, thus making the term synonymous with art. He speculates that if there will be any literary language play (*Sprachspiel*) at all, this may entail no more than automated word games. Either an artificial intelligence generates an ongoing output of word compositions, or people called poets rapidly disseminate electronically created, randomized linguistic permutations (2011: 76). As insistent as he is in his prognosis, as discontented he feels about the consequences: “What we fear, as we anticipate [...] the end of alphabetic writing is the decline of reading, that is, of critical decoding. We fear that in the future, all messages, especially models of perception and experience, will be taken in uncritically, that the informatic revolution could turn people into receivers who remix messages uncritically, that is, into robots.” (2011: 77)

To present us with such a dilemma is quite typical for Flusser. On the one hand, he gladly embraces the ongoing revolution from text to image as an inevitable and necessary development, on the other hand, he adamantly warns of its dire effects (Ströhl 2013: 134). To face the upcoming

challenges that the new codes present us with, he calls for a techno-imagination (1996: 209), a competence in dealing with images as well as the operators and apparatuses behind them. He emphasizes throughout his media-oriented works that a conceptually trained visual competence is critical to the future of human communication.

In Flusser's theory, literary texts and the techno-imagination seem to be polar opposites: the former firmly rooted in the historical consciousness of linguistic communication, the latter making the leap not just to another form of communication, but to an entirely new approach to perceiving and understanding the world. This dichotomy begs the question: Can writing be instrumental in developing the techno-imagination? In other words, can we overcome writing from within writing? After all, Flusser communicates his media-phenomenology almost exclusively in written and spoken form. In *Does Writing Have A Future?*, the irony becomes particularly apparent: "The book's challenge, but also its appeal, are its self-referentiality: the fact that Flusser reflects within writing and under the conditions of writing about its impending doom and about these very conditions; this reflection, in turn, is then subject to a meta-reflection" (Ströhl 2013: 73, my translation). In the postscript to the second edition of *Does Writing Have A Future?* Flusser explains what would be required to move beyond writing. He believes that there are really only two possible directions to follow: "Back to the image or forward towards numbers. Back to the imagination or forward towards calculation" (2002: 154, my translation). Ultimately, so he contends, these two approaches would arrive at the same outcome. He laments the fact that he himself lacks the mathematical abilities to carry out such an endeavor, and that those who do have the abilities lack any interest in dealing with language. He directs a tongue-in-cheek appeal to all those who are writing in spite of this dilemma, taking on the impossible challenge. "As such, the attempt must be made despite the knowledge of one's own incompetence (its inevitable failure). Exactly this renders thinking so dramatic for an essayist: He knows his own incompetence and turns to more competent thinkers in order to carry on with his attempt. Knowledge of one's own incompetence is not necessarily a disadvantage. One can make fun of oneself in order to advance the attempt" (2002: 155, my translation).

If attempting to overcome writing from within writing is necessary, then the question is: Can literary texts be part of such an endeavor? Is it possible that genres like fiction, poetry, or drama are instrumental in developing the techno-imagination?

In his lecture series *Post-History*, for example, Flusser articulates the hope that art as a magic gesture can undermine the power of apparatuses and enable people to escape their intoxicating delirium. It remains unclear if this relates to literary texts as well, although he does make the concession: "It is worth adding that the artistic gesture is not limited to the field that apparatus[es]

called ‘art.’ On the contrary, this magic gesture occurs in every field: in science, technique, economy and philosophy. In all of these fields there are [...] those that publish private experiences and create new information” (2013b: 138). This gesture of publishing private experiences is, of course, an important aspect in the production of literary arts. After all, Flusser himself employs a highly metaphorical writing style that combines philosophical reflection with fictional narrative. “Indeed, Flusser’s goal comprises researching a poetic truth, not finding some ultimate concordance between concept and topic” (Finger, Guldin, Bernardo 2011: 117). In *Does Writing Have A Future?*, he contends that poetry—in the very broad sense of art—is critical to any perception:

Poetry produces models of experience, and without such models, we would hardly be able to perceive anything. We would be anesthetized and would have to rely on our atrophied instincts—stagger about blind, deaf, and numb. Poets are our organs of perception. We see, hear, taste, and smell on the basis of models we have from poets. The world appears to us through these models. (2011: 72)

I want to suggest that this potential to provide models of perception applies to literary texts as well, and, moreover, that these literary models can inform and shape the techno-imagination. By looking at literary texts that persistently and extensively engage with the image culture, I show how fiction can undermine the influence of apparatuses by informing the perception of them. According to Flusser, the difficulty with technical images lies in their supposed realism. They seem to be representing reality, while in fact, they represent concepts. The challenge for the techno-imagination is to decode and criticize such images. As such, he defines the techno-imagination as “the ability to create images from concepts and to decode such images as symbols of concepts” (1996: 209, my translation). Literary images are not, unlike technical images, denying their status as conceptual compositions. While technical images deceive their viewers with a supposed realism, literary images are free to leave that realism behind. The novels *Games* by Ulrike Draesner (2005) and *42* by Thomas Lehr (2005) engage precisely in such conceptual approaches to images. In fact, it is possible to relate these literary texts to core ideas from Flusser’s media theory, such as the photographer as *homo ludens*, communication as resistance to natural entropy, the redefinition of transcendence, and the re-conceptualization of space and time. The imaginative and fictional capacity of the genre thus provides one of the conceptual spaces in which a techno-imagination is drafted, tested, and applied. These literary texts are examples for attempts to blow a breach into the programs that dominate contemporary culture and—if we follow Flusser’s line of argument—everyone’s thinking.

Homo ludens

Ulrike Draesner is known as a particularly media-savvy writer.¹ In essays, poetry, and fiction, she often draws attention to the powerful and persuasive nature of images. On the occasion of the Soccer World Cup in Germany in 2010, she published an essay that recalls the terrorist attack on the Olympic Games in Munich in 1972. For her, the event exemplifies a new era in which images are no longer the byproduct of historical events, but their main goal. The German public found itself “in the double-grip of its own image needs as well as of the expected immense image production,” and at the same time, “world-embracing media [were] part of the terror strategies” (Draesner 2009, my translation) for the terrorist group. Her essay resonates closely with Flusser’s thesis of a post-historical age when technical images, particularly television, become the “retaining dam of history” (1996: 152, my translation), i.e., the final purpose for events.

Draesner’s novel *Games* tells the story of the photojournalist Katja whose personal curiosity leads her to research the exact circumstances of the terrorist attack in 1972. Katja had followed the news coverage as a 12-year old child who grew up in Munich. As an adult, she wants to know what led to the disastrous failure in the police operations. During the attack, members of the Palestinian liberation group Black September took eleven Israeli athletes hostage and demanded the release of well over a hundred political prisoners affiliated with Black September. The Israeli and German governments refused to give in to their demands and, eventually, a gigantic showdown occurred that left all hostages and six terrorists dead as well as several policemen wounded. In researching this incident, Katja goes back to the old media coverage and uses her professional understanding of technically-produced images in order to critically reflect on them. She represents the kind of photographer who seeks to understand the intention of the apparatus that produced and disseminated these images in order to escape their manipulative power.

In Flusser’s terminology, Katja would be a *homo ludens*.² “Playing against the apparatus—within the apparatus and against the supposed intention of the program” (Ströhl 2013: 178) is within Flusser’s work one of the three main strategies to escape the powerful influences that technical images and the apparatuses have over the human mind.³ In his essay, *Towards a Philosophy of*

1 Michael Braun calls her “Medienautorin” (a media author) (2007), a term that Draesner herself uses to describe Ingeborg Bachmann’s work.

2 Flusser adapts the term which the cultural anthropologist Johann Huizinga coined in 1938 to describe human behavior.

3 Ströhl identifies three strategies; the second is rendering communicative acts into more interactive dialogues, which allow subjects to create meaningful information; the third is the widespread acquisition of media competence which would turn all recipients of apparatuses into operators and programmers. (2013: 178)

Photography, Flusser compares the photographer with chess players, “just as they play with chess pieces, photographers play with the camera” (2012: 27). Katja engages in both regular games and games with apparatuses through which she seeks to establish her own freedom. She simultaneously learns to play chess and to take photos. In closely observing the players’ facial expressions and body language through her camera lens, she acquires the rules and strategies of both chess and photography. Katja grows to become a particularly skillful photographer and savvy critic of the apparatuses. Her success as a photojournalist is based on her ability to engage her camera in a game of coincidences until she eventually is able to capture those highly improbable shots that can rarely be seen in images. Unforeseen and unplanned reunions of family members and moments of intense neighborly love feature most prominently in her photography. For her, the most fundamental skill of a good photographer begins “where one is able to see something through something” (88).

Katja’s role as a player against the political apparatus behind the Olympic Games consists in finding information about the fatal shootings that the media coverage is intended to conceal. In researching the historical events, she uses, just as Flusser suggests, her “critical awareness [...] so as to make the photograph transparent” (2012: 63) for the programs behind it. The novel describes how the organizers of the Olympic Games are primarily concerned with establishing the impression that the Games were a joyous, gaudy, and peaceful event. Before the terrorist attack, screens all throughout Munich alternately display smiling athletes and idyllic mountain scenery. The goal is to supersede over the dark memories of the 1936 Olympic Games that took place during Hitler’s rule and were glorified by Leni Riefenstahl’s artful cinematography. This obsession goes so far as to reduce the presence of security personnel, one of the factors which ultimately allows the terrorists to enter the premises and take the Israeli athletes hostage. At every step of the following news coverage of the hostage taking, the organizers desperately try to sustain their image politics. During what they inaptly call “Operation Sunshine,” they are always concerned with concealing any wrongdoings that are made in handling the crisis. Concerning the historical facts, Draesner’s novel follows the findings of the historian Simon Reeve who heavily criticizes the German authorities in his publication *One Day in September* leaving no doubt that poor foresight, mismanagement, and flawed decision making led to the escalation.

In revisiting the old media coverage, Katja uncovers precisely those instances of failure that the images are trying to hide. She provides an example for a critic “who attempts to see what is going on in the automatic game of programming” (2012: 74) as Flusser calls it. Representative for multiple hidden political agendas behind a technical image is the footage of a masked terrorist keeping guard over the hostages. The TV stations broadcast the footage so frequently that, each time she looks at it,

Katja is uncertain whether they are still or yet again showing it (106). The mask becomes a symbol for hiding more than just the man's identity. The image itself becomes a mask that hides the intentions behind it. Indicative for the success of this strategy is the recollection of Katja's friend Susanne twelve years later: "I remember, the terrorist on the balcony with his mask, one eye much larger than the other, sinister. However, all other images appear to be hidden behind a veil" (211). This metaphorical veil has several layers: The mask conceals the terrorist's identity and reduces him to being "a man consisting of one deed, one day, one goal" (255); but it also deflects the attention from the diplomatic and political strategies during the ongoing negotiations, such as Israel's and Germany's categorical refusal to grant the demanded release of prisoners (250-251); and finally it deflects the attention from the disastrous handling of the crisis by the security forces. Most importantly, however, the image of the masked man conceals the fact that it is an end in itself. Demanding the release of prisoners was really a secondary objective for the terrorists. In a communiqué by Black September that Draesner uses to prefix her novel, the leaders proudly announce that they consider the attack a major success despite their losses. The image of the masked Palestinian which was broadcast worldwide raised their political battle from being a regional dispute in the Near East to one of the most critical global issues. "It was like painting the name of Palestine on a mountain top that can be seen from the four corners of the earth" (quoted after Draesner 2005: Preface). Throughout the novel, Katja cuts through the complex layers of intentions, agendas, and strategies in order to understand the image of the terrorist instead of being blinded by its supposed realism.

Post-historical Time

Another example for an approximation to Flusser's philosophy of the techno-imagination is Thomas Lehr's novel *42*. The science-fiction satire envisions a world without the passage of time. It paints the scenario that the earth halts in its rotation and comes to a complete standstill. As a result, the sun is constantly shining onto a quite literally "enlightened" Europe. Along with the standstill, all life on earth also freezes and becomes motionless. Only a handful of scientist and journalists remain unaffected by the freezing and, from then on, move through the frozen world inside bubbles of individual time, which the novel compares to Leibnitzian monads. The novel thus explores the contrast between being and becoming, countless metaphors and references to still and moving images highlight the post-historical dimension of this contrast.

One of the primary aspects of the techno-imagination is for Flusser that the dichotomy between being and becoming is rendered obsolete. In his essay collection, *Lob der Oberflächlichkeit (Praise of Superficiality)*, he emphasizes the perspective of a filmmaker who is editing his shots into a film. From this perspective, he explains, the century-old difference between Heraclitus, who understood the world as a constant flow, and Parmenides, who insisted on the static nature of all things, does no longer apply. For those who rise to the consciousness of image editing and montage techniques, both sides are simply aspects of the same procedure, the technical manipulation of images (1993: 158). This dichotomy also comes to bear on Lehr's novel. Here, the scientists among the surviving people desperately seek explanations for the absurd standstill of the earth. At two points the novel uses mathematical formulas in order to give examples for futile scientific attempts to understand and improve their situation, first the Wheeler-de-Witt Equation, then the Second Law of Thermodynamics. In a self-commentary, Lehr explains:

Both formulas lead to the heart of physics-based reflections on the nature of time, one as a Heraclitian generator, by providing a (controversial) explanation for the direction of the arrow of time, the other as a kind of late-Parmenidean agent, expressing the fact that a description of the world based on quantum theory no longer requires any time parameter whatsoever. (2006: 451, my translation)

The text thus playfully engages in a similar line of thought as Flusser does. It maps the opposition between the classical philosophers onto modern scientific discourse within the context of a standing (literary) image. Just as Flusser predicts it, the novel never resolves the difference between Heraclitus and Parmenides, between thermodynamics and quantum theory. The novel does not overcome the standstill, the few surviving people continue to struggle with aging and gradual physical decline; the ones who are frozen never change.

The story ends when the narrator passes away, which is why some critics call it “an other-worldly novel,” (Clauer 2006: 19, my translation) arguing that it essentially describes how one man is looking back to this world just before leaving it. In this sense, the narration takes place to counteract, albeit temporarily, the inevitable entropic decline that ends in death. The overarching premise of Flusser's *Kommunikologie* is that human communication is a means to overcome entropy. Although this endeavor may never fully succeed, communication serves to store and transmit information in order to generate new information, and thereby does not give in to the entropic decay. Ultimately, nothing can escape the heat death, but due to this resistance Flusser calls human communication “unnatural,” “counter natural,” or “negative entropic” (1996: 12, my translation). The main purpose of human

communication is, according to Flusser, to make humans forget the inevitability of their decline.⁴ Lehr's novel presents this idea in a nutshell and shows how understanding the negative entropic tendency can lead to a different outlook on the world. It demonstrates in dramatic ways how widely accepted categories and norms are instantly rendered redundant the moment that the narrator takes on a post-historic, or techno-imaginary, point-of-view.

The post-historic perspective reveals, as Flusser points out, that the natural sciences are in a crisis. "The universe of the discourse of science, under unlimited expansion, amputates its evaluative and causal dimensions and becomes a formal and empty universe: an existentially meaningless universe" (2013b: 41). The crisis stems from the decline of linearity and causality. Where cause and effect cannot explain the natural world, the universe remains without purpose, and thus appears absurd and empty from an existential point-of-view. In 42, the characters face precisely such an existential absurdity. They are stuck in stagnant world where no cause can have the effect to make the earth move again. The world-class scientists at the *Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire* (CERN) in Geneva where the story takes place, cannot find any solution to this existential crisis. Entangled in myth-making, quasi-religious devotion, fantasies of omnipotence, and self-destructive obsession, the scientists remain utterly helpless. The narrator thus redefines the acronym as "Organization for Chaos, Ecstasy, Rage, and Nihilism" (27) (*Organisation für Chaos, Ekstase, Raserei und Nihilismus*). A powerful machine called "Heraclitus" (96), which could kick the earth back into gear, remains wishful thinking. They cannot, as it were, design a meta-apparatus to control all apparatuses. Influenced by Hannah Arendt (Ströhl 2013: 172-173), Flusser understands the Holocaust as a far-reaching failure and collapse of values that fundamentally undermines all of Western culture (2013b: 5). Unlike Flusser's theory, not Auschwitz, but Hiroshima represents the epitome of the post-historic crisis in the novel. One of the scientists from Japan compares the stopping of time to the standstill that befell Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the explosion of the atomic bombs (283). The narrator also speaks of the earth's condition as "time bomb after time bomb exploding" (54). The immensely destructive use of scientific knowledge has categorically shattered trust in it.

Another aspect of Lehr's dystopia is the devaluation of ethical standards. Set in the birth place of the Geneva Conventions, the novel describes how crimes are so abundant that it becomes a convention for every survivor always to carry several fire arms for the purpose of self-defense. The myriad of motionless bodies strewn around are especially easy prey for theft or abuse.

Without time, Lehr's horrific scenario ultimately suspends all human value systems; in a world

⁴ Finger, Guldin, and Bernardo point out that this notion of communication may go back to Flusser's Jewish roots. In the Jewish tradition, remembrance serves to keep alive those who have passed away (Finger, Guldin, Bernardo 2011: 85).

without constant interaction between the self and other people, human experience loses most of its meaning. Without the passage of time to generate change, development and productive understanding, the individual is barred from any negotiation of identity, and therefore also of freedom. (Polster 2009: 29)

Flusser suggests that the distinction between “good” versus “bad” is rendered obsolete when we overcome the linear, historical consciousness. “It is pointless to ask if a photograph is good in the sense of speaking of sandwiches or noble deeds. Here, one needs to ask critically, to what end it intends to be good and according to which criteria” (1993, 38, my translation). Lehr’s novel provides a poignant example for the difficulties in dealing with such a shift. The characters are left without ethical orientation and struggle to create even the most minimal ethical standards for their co-existences in the still world, a so-called “Chronikette,” which has little impact on anyone’s behavior. Within the stasis of a photographic image, both the intention behind and the consequences of human action can no longer provide the criteria for distinguishing good from bad behavior. The crisis of ethical values leaves a void for a new understanding of morality. In this sense, the novel is a provocation that challenges its readers to consider alternatives.

Preparing a New Discourse

Lehr’s and Draesner’s novels demonstrate how literary texts engage in the shift towards a new thinking within and about the image culture. Draesner presents a photographer who enters into a game against the apparatuses that stand behind the images of the Olympic Games. Using her knowledge as photographer, the protagonist exercises her freedom by criticizing the programs. Lehr opens a post-historic world where historical time no longer exists and demonstrates the extreme challenges that result from that paradigm shift. Both science and ethics cease to function as binding forces and as such leave gaping holes for society. These literary texts are not so much observing an ongoing trend, which they cast into fiction. They are using the fictitious worlds in order to play with new concepts of time, identity, and values. With reference to Wolfgang Iser’s literary theory one can say: These texts provide occasions to playfully engage with images in the realm of the imaginary (*das Imaginäre*). The imagination⁵ serves to turn the diffuse imaginary into what Iser calls “products”, such as perception, mental images, dreams, or hallucinations (1993: 315). In these novels, the products are

⁵ Wolfgang Iser distinguishes the terms *Phantasie*, *Imagination*, and *Einbildungskraft*. His distinction can be translated as creative imagination, pictorial imagination, re-collective imagination (1993: 292). He understand the imaginary (*das Imaginäre*) as a diffuse power that influences the imagination and that takes a concrete form, among other products, in literary fiction.

literary images that concern themselves with technical images. Images, the imaginary, and imagination interact playfully while remaining open to possibilities and ramifications, thus inviting interpretation and further exploration. Neither Lehr's nor Draesner's novel attempts to give any definitive statement concerning the paradigmatic shift in our culture. These texts merely envision a change and play with notions, ideas, fears, hopes, and forebodings in order to approximate its potential consequences. In that sense, they participate in the formation of an awareness which relies on the ability that Flusser labels as techno-imagination.

Flusser only occasionally makes references to the creative potential of writing and writers, mostly in his earlier texts which are less focused on the impact of media-technology and more widely interested in a phenomenological inquiry towards a new humanism.⁶ One such work is *Natural:Mind* (2013a).⁷ Here, Flusser explores in a series of phenomenological essays the complex relation between nature and culture. In his essay "Valleys," he uses landscape metaphors in order to develop a theory of cultural memory. He defines valleys as "places toward which progress advances and stagnates," and explains, "but there, it stagnates in a particular structure: as the structure of 'memory' in the Platonic, biological, psychological and cybernetic sense (and maybe also in other senses)" (2013a: 15). The memory formation occurs in the valleys because "they are [...] places where information is constantly regrouped and restructured [...] places where discourses from the plains are dialogued" (2013a: 16).

In this essay, Flusser presents what one might consider a literary theory in a nutshell as writers and poets fulfill special roles in his model of memory formation: "That is why valleys are the places for thinkers and poets, from Heraclitus to Nietzsche, David to Rilke. But not for prophets. [...] Prophets pass through the valleys and climb [...] to the mountain's summit. They go one step beyond the valley's inhabitants, and then return. On the way back they do not even rest in the valley that they cross. They go directly into the plains in order to tell their 'news.' [...] For them, the valley is a channel between the plain and the summit, and the summit and the plain [...]. Here is what the valley is, in a map projected from the mountain's summit: no longer a dam, but the place in between. [...] And the question that emerges in such a map is this: is the one who is in the valley still climbing or already going down? Is he still a thinker (the re-formulator of the plain's discourse, of 'prose'), or is he already a poet (the preparer of a new discourse)?" (17)

To understand this passage, it is critical to bear in mind how Flusser distinguishes discourse and

⁶ Ströhl identifies three phases in Flusser's life and work: A Marxist phase in Prague, his search for a new humanism in Brazil, and his studies in communication and technology in France (2013: 226).

⁷ First published 1979 in Portuguese under the title *Natural:Mente*.

dialogue: “The two principles presuppose and are dependent on each other. Dialogues are necessary to create new information by recombining already existing information. New information, on the other hand, is stored in discourses whose aim it is to conserve and transmit it to future generations” (Finger, Guldin, Bernardo 2011: 89).

Poets and thinkers, i.e. writers of prose, take on the function of intermediaries who process information in order to keep it alive in the cultural memory and to make it available for new combinations. They are not prophets and do not foresee what is coming, but they deliver and receive material from prophets and communicate it in new ways. Thus they either participate in ongoing discourses or initiate new ones. If they can prepare new discourses, as Flusser suggests, these can then stimulate new dialogues and thereby encourage new ways of thinking. Flusser himself offers the example of Franz Kafka. In his essay “Waiting for Kafka” (2002b), he praises Kafka’s self-irony which makes his readers realize their predicament as subjects ruled by senseless powers. In this sense, Kafka’s writings influenced Flusser’s notion of the apparatus, by which he means not just the camera, but also the distribution channels behind it (Ströhl 2013: 170-171).⁸ It seems that the title “preparer of a new discourse” would apply to Kafka.

The other important observation that Flusser makes concerning the potential of writing is its capacity to allow a writer to exercise his freedom. In his essay “Fingers,” he describes the act of typewriting as prototypical struggle between apparatus and individual, or more generally, between culture and nature. The challenge is for the fingers to act freely while being confined to the limits that the apparatus sets. “It is true that the criteria are imposed upon the fingers: by the order of the keyboard, by the rules of language and by the structure of my thoughts. But these criteria make possible and give meaning to the fingers’ movements; that is they open a field of choices. My fingers are free within the situation described” (2013a: 59). Flusser goes on to analyze the dialectics between apparatus and individual by pointing out how both are dependent on one another. Just as the fingers must move in a way that is appropriate to the typewriter; the typewriter can only be moved by the fingers. “The machine and fingers then become the two horizons of a dialectic relation (that of writing) in which one horizon exists for the other” (2013a: 61). He repeatedly insists that, while the writer’s fingers are limited, they nevertheless exercise their freedom and thus realize their own nature within the culture of the apparatus.

⁸ He occasionally makes explicit references to Kafka when giving a definition of the term apparatus, for example: “This is precisely the characteristic of the functioning of apparatuses: The functionary controls the apparatus thanks to the control of its exterior (the input and output) and is controlled by it thanks to the impenetrability of its interior. To put it another way: Functionaries control a game over which they have no competence. The world of Kafka, in fact.” (Flusser 2013: 28)

Within Flusser's oeuvre, there are no direct statements about ways in which the techno-imagination and the literary imagination could interact. Nevertheless, it seems that literary writing that seeks to exercise its freedom and to feed critical input into the literary discourses can have a place in Flusser's media-phenomenology, albeit a minor one. The novels by Draesner and Lehr are simultaneously acknowledging and criticizing an all-pervading image culture as the horizon within which they operate. Within this horizon, they shape the perception of images in the attempt to move beyond the intentions behind them—programs, as Flusser has it. The literary imagination in these novels turns towards the power that images have over perception of the world and criticizes it. Draesner's novel uses the concepts of play and games in order to demonstrate how engaging in a game of chance against apparatuses can empower the individual. Lehr's novel sharpens the awareness for the need to adapt a post-historic consciousness by picturing a crisis of thought, value, and identities that remain tied to the historical, linear paradigm. Just as Flusser developed his position of freedom from the apparatuses in writing, these novels make use of writing's potential to offer freedom. Flusser's phenomenological statements about poets as preparers of new discourses and typewriting as a realization of individual freedom, give reason to assume that fiction may very well figure into the development of the techno-imagination. Specific to the literary text is its capacity to draw upon the imaginary; the techno-imagination will need to participate in this force as well, if it aims to see behind the deceptive realism of technical images. In this imaginative potential lies quite possibly the only remaining promise for the future of writing.

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