

## Introduction

*Flusser Studies 21* focuses on design and emphasizes Vilém Flusser's original contribution to a philosophy of design, which reverberates with his concepts of communication, media, gestures, translation, and technical images. Unfortunately, as Lucia Santaella pointed out in her essay, the originality of his approach has not yet been sufficiently studied, especially by those in the design field, a situation, which this issue hopes to improve upon. Flusser pointed to a design dimension that is rarely discussed: its power to trick, its meaning as fraud, and the inherent cunning in the art of projecting deception devices. For the philosopher, the design at the base of every culture "tricks nature by technical means, substituting the natural with the artificial (...) and astutely transforming simple mammals conditioned by nature into free artists."

Lucia Santaella's contribution, "Astúcias do Design" [Cunning Strategies of Design] therefore opens the discussion. Beginning with the etymology of the word design, she surveys a number of approaches to design, in order to discuss and emphasize Flusser's original philosophical contribution.

Michael Hanke's analysis, "Vilém Flusser's Philosophy of Design: Sketching the Outlines and Mapping the Sources," continues to engage Flusser's design philosophy through the discussion of his central publications dedicated to the theme. Hanke's comprehensive article establishes the origin and context for each essay included in Flusser's central design books. He analyzes how Flusser developed and articulated a constellation of theorems over three decades by translating central concepts to address different audiences, conference themes, and publication opportunities. He further points out the connections between Flusser and other philosophers, especially Plato and Heidegger, but also Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, which are important references in Flusser's writings.

Flusser's approach to design is also deeply connected to his concept of gestures, as the visual essay of Andrew Hieronymi emphasizes. In "Autotelic Digital Play: Flusser and the Gesture of Smoking a Pipe," Hieronymi examines gestures in video games and interactive art installations. His slide-show intertwines Flusser's quotes from the "The Gesture of Smoking a Pipe" with images of various forms of interface created by his former students. The result,

both in form and content, adds a fresh and performative perspective to the discussion of gestures, writing, and play.

Priscila Arantes and Sérgio Nesteriuk, “Programing the Visible: Conversations Between Vilém Flusser and Harun Farocki,” expands upon Hieronymi’s examination of videogames, although with a more somber tone. It further connects design, art, and technology by discussing videogames as part of the image criticism developed in different ways by both Farocki and Flusser. In Farocki’s exhibition at the Paço das Artes in São Paulo (Jan.-Mar., 2016), among other works, he examined the fast changes over a few decades of videogame development, from two-dimensional graphics to three-dimensional renderings, designed to keep players engaged in a state of “flow”. The article discusses other media images through the conversation between Farocki and Flusser regarding the first page of the German sensationalist tabloid *Bild Zeitung* (this video was one of the works in Farocki’s exhibition). While deconstructing the tabloid’s graphic design, Flusser calls attention to how images and words are combined to reinforce a subliminal celebration of violence as something trivial. Central to both the filmmaker’s and the philosopher’s work is the possibility of creating a critical perspective of our media culture. For them, the question of freedom is paramount in a society increasingly programmed and dominated by images.

Lucas Bambozzi’s essay “Espaço Informacional: o que se vê e o que não é aparente” [Informational Space: what we see and what is not apparent] focuses upon the material, yet invisible dimension of wireless technology. In the realm of mobile communication, invisible waves are ever more present in the urban fabric, and yet, they are not apparent to the naked eye. An artist based in São Paulo who works with mobile technology all over the world, Bambozzi employs the notion of *site-specificity* in art to discuss creative processes and artworks that make electromagnetic fields, Hertz waves, and Wi-Fi signals, visible. The article emphasizes the dramatic convergence and crossing of signs and systems of communication in heavily trafficked urban zones such as the center of the city of São Paulo.

Just as Hieronymi expands upon Flusser’s concept of gestures, Ana Pato explores the relationship between design and translation by making reference and building upon Rainer Guldin’s work on Flusser’s theory of translation. Pato’s essay, “O tradutor e a Janela: Entre o Método e a Prática [The Translator and The Window: Between Method and Praxis],” employs translation as a method, and connects Flusser’s practice of translation with the archival explorations of the Brazilian artist Mabe Bethônico; more specifically, Bethônico’s

exploration of the archives of the Swiss geographer Edgar Aubert de la Rüe in Geneva. This article approaches history, and an archive of ethnographic studies, in terms of the fluidity between fictional and non-fictional narratives.

We conclude this issue with two reviews: the first, “Exhibiting the Archive,” by Rafael Cardoso, examines the exhibition *Without Firm Ground—Flusser and the Arts*; and the second, by Simone Osthoff, focuses on the symposium *Transcoding Flusser: Synthetic Thinking*, which took place this Spring in the Hague. The exhibition *Without Firm Ground—Flusser and the Arts* was first showcased in the Fall of 2015 at the ZKM in Karlsruhe. In December of 2015, the exhibition travelled to the Akademie der Künste, in Berlin, and in March of 2016, to the West Den Haag in a smaller format. In each of these venues, the exhibition was accompanied by an international symposium. The international symposium *Transcoding Flusser: Synthetic Thinking* (April 15-16, 2016) continued to advance Flusser’s legacy by examining not only Flusser’s speculations about the future of the digital revolution, but also the connections between concepts he developed early in his 1960s publications, and later in his media theory of the 1980s.

As the authors in this issue argue, Flusser’s original approach to design is an important part of his multidimensional work and it continues to provoke us to think differently about cultural history through the most basic elements of our lives. We hope to encourage new research and we look forward to continuing these discussions in future articles and events about Flusser and design.

Beginning with this issue, *Flusser Studies* will also be available as a print out edition.

Simone Osthoff and Priscila Arantes June 2016