

Introduction

The centrality of style in the work of Vilém Flusser is the focus of this special issue of *Flusser Studies*. Flusser's writing is frequently paradoxical — at the same time challenging and sceptical, prophetic and ironic. Such combinations reflect his two major influences separated in time by thousands of years. First, the Jewish heritage, a legacy of the people who have long been proud of being the People of the Book. Second, the history of the twentieth century marked by the dilemmas of modernity at the end of the second millennium.

The life of the Czech-Brazilian philosopher between 1920 and 1991 practically coincides with that of his native Czechoslovakia, which existed between 1918 and 1992. The philosopher spent his life migrating between continents and hemispheres, crossing and building bridges across oceans, languages, and cultures. His condition of eternal migrant shaped his style and work, making him a privileged traveller of thought.

Hypotheses, reflections, and provocations, common in his letters, articles, and books, are inseparable from the style in which he wrote them. A style that continues to generate equally extreme reactions in readers, oscillating between irritation and admiration. By habitually appealing to irony, not only in certain passages but in the very structure of his texts, Flusser practiced a philosophical fiction, as Abraham Moles recognized, or a fictional philosophy, as the various authors in this issue acknowledge and emphasize.

We open the issue with four short unpublished texts by Flusser himself: “Time”, “Apokalypse und Fuge” [Apocalypse and Fugue], “Türkische Fabel” [A Turkish Fable], and “Das Märchen der Wahrheit” [The Fairy Tale of Truth]. They show some of his early literary talent and his highly ironical style on the border of literature and philosophy.

We continue with the essay “A Metamorfose de Kafka em Flusser” [The Metamorphosis of Kafka in Flusser], written by the Brazilian author and Flusser scholar Gustavo Bernardo Krause. In his text, Krause observes that the most famous metamorphosis of literature occurs suddenly in the first sentence of Franz Kafka's novel published in 1915. But it proved to be long-lasting. For more than a hundred years, *The Metamorphosis* continues to generate other metamorphoses: in culture, literature, readers, and writers. Among writers, is our Czech philosopher who, because of the Holocaust, metamorphosed himself into a Brazilian, and at the same time, into a foreigner everywhere in the

world. His philosophical fiction continues the sardonic irony we normally associate with Kafka. And in the course of his metamorphoses Flusser became a character himself, as Rainer Guldin and Gustavo Bernardo pointed out in the biography they wrote of this *bodenlos* man, groundless and philosophizing without foundation. Flusser was further called a meta-Švejk man by Sérgio Paulo Rouanet, and he preferred to present himself as a post-Kafka author, rather than as a post-philosopher, post-Husserl, or even post-Vaihinger.

The Swiss scholar and editor of *Flusser Studies* Rainer Guldin contributes with the article “Writing Philosophy: On Vilém Flusser’s Multilingual Dialogical Style”, in which he discusses Flusser’s multilingual essayistic style, based in part on a practice of constant translation and retranslation. Guldin observes that Flusser frequently uses challenging metaphors and even annoying comparisons, through an array of rhetorical devices including, etymologies, puns based on homophones (paronomasia), and polysemy, in order to draw the reader’s attention to the fundamental constructed ways of our looking at the world. According to Guldin, Flusser’s way of breaking up, multiplying, mixing, comparing, combining, linking, and connecting ideas is a strategy used to create novelty and surprise, as well as a way to convey new information through recombination. Here Flusser’s philosophy operates on a meta-communicative level: language is a model, a network that captures meaning, given that all languages are artificial, and words do not primarily mean objects but other words of the same language or different languages. Languages are not primarily representational but, actually, interconnected systems of signs. Flusser calls our attention to the material side of the medium he is using, to the diversified opacity of the different languages he writes with. In sum, Flusser wanted to achieve these different goals by having us embark with him, as dialogical partners, upon an ironical journey.

In her article, “The Protreptic Writer”, the British scholar and Flusser translator Nancy Roth analyses Flusser’s essay “The Gesture of Smoking a Pipe”, by proposing that at least on occasion, Flusser’s writing can be usefully identified as “protreptic”. Protreptic is an ancient form of speech or writing to persuade an audience, and also served to display the author’s skills and attract students. It was never confined to a particular genre of writing, but always addressed its audience in a specified situation, that is, in circumstances shared by writer and reader. Applied to Flusser’s writing, the “communicative purpose” becomes a way for examining both the compositional structure and the implicit dialogue between writer and reader that appears in the text. Questions about the implied identity of readers, and of their relationship to the writer, lead to a conclusion that even as the text questions the right way to classify *the gesture of smoking a pipe*, it performs a phenomenological inquiry. The reader plays the role of audience to the performance, and so becomes the object of persuasion at

another level as well. Roth's paper further suggests that the study of rhetorical structures in Flusser's writing may reveal a new level of coherence across its languages, disciplines, and genres.

Gabriel Salvi Philipson's article, "Flusser para além do ensaio: de outros modos possíveis de habitar a intersecção entre ficção e filosofia" [Flusser Beyond the Essay: Of Other Possible Ways to Inhabit the Intersection between Fiction and Philosophy], analyses philosophical, rhetorical, and fictional strategies of some of Flusser's texts included in *Ficções filosóficas* (1999) [Philosophical Fictions]. Philipson discusses how Flusser explored the intersection between fiction and philosophy and argues that Flusser is very aware of issues of form and style in philosophical texts. On the one hand, he sees Flusser's unorthodoxy, his multiple points of views, (auto)irony, sarcasm, performance against the apparatus, etc., as critical strategies which contrast with the institutionalization of philosophy in the Brazilian Universities at the time, occurring simultaneously to the publication of some of Flusser's texts. Philipson observes that academic philosophers sacrificed literature in the name of a European-influenced philosophical community established in São Paulo. They were against the ancient, pompous, and elitist style of conceptual writing, but also opposed other forms of conceptual knowledge, such as Eastern or indigenous philosophy. On the other hand, are Flusser's particularities of writing, which distinguish him from other already classical contemporary essay writers, such as Theodor Adorno, who does not disrupt the contraposition between subject and object, theory and art.

The Brazilian scholars Thays Assunção Reis and Rodrigo Nascimento Reis co-authored "Ficção Filosófica e Perspectivismo Ameríndio: Diálogos conceituais entre Vilém Flusser e Eduardo Viveiros de Castro" [Philosophical Fiction and Amerindian Perspectivism: Conceptual Dialogues between Vilém Flusser and Viveiros de Castro]. Focusing upon Flusser's theoretical contribution to the theme of identity and identification, the article draws approximations between Flusserian thought and the Amerindian Perspectivism of the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. The authors demonstrate how Flusser's *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis* is an exercise in perspectivism, an imaginative experience in which one adopts the point of view of the Other, in this case, the point of view of a deep-sea creature, therefore, drawing interconnections between the two thinkers.

Mara Recklies, a fellow researcher at the Hamburg Academy of Fine Arts (HFBK), examines in "Im Spielraum der Ironie. Wie Vilém Flusser über Design schrieb" [The Scope of Irony: How Flusser wrote about Design], how Flusser's writings on design are mainly characterized by an essayistic and ironic style. She highlights how Flusser's phenomenological narration of objects blurry distinctions between high and common culture. Recklies further explains why Flusser's writings about design and ethics, or design and war, are described as being difficult, and even provocative. It is, however, not

only the content of Flusser's essays that provokes, but also his ironic and parodist style of writing, which he used in order to caricaturize the complacency of the design debates of his time, and to point out the evasive question of responsibility in design. Flusser noted that the issue of ethics in relation to designed objects was never raised, and consequently, he portrayed the design of common or mundane objects as being irresponsible. The result was that designers focused their attention solely on the object, rather than on the people who use it, or on the cultural context in which they are being used. Accordingly, Flusser identified design as a tool by which culture betrayed itself. To emphasize this point, he employed images and exaggerations in his essays, which he called "karikaturale Vereinfachungen." Flusser uses an elaborate etymological juggling of words and caricatures, which is key to his writings on design. Recklies states that without exaggeration and irony, Flusser could not completely express his philosophy of design.

In "Leggere Flusser" [Reading Flusser], Francesco Restuccia, professor at Università degli Studi di Roma, reminds us that reading Flusser is not easy: sometimes, one gets lost in his nomadic thought. Flusser's writing has to be understood as a game, with its own rules, and the reader needs to play with those rules, by following them or by transgressing them. In this short essay, an excerpt from his doctoral dissertation, Restuccia detects some of Flusser's habits as a writer, which he believes any reader should take into account. He argues that while Flusser's anti-academicism, his plurilingualism, and his interdisciplinary approach, demand extra work from readers, the effort can be very fruitful.

The Argentine video artist Esteban Prado is also a fictional writer. In his article "Vilém Flusser, escritor-pensador: modos de la escritura en *El universo de las imágenes técnicas*" [Vilém Flusser, Writer-Thinker: Forms of Writing in *Into the Universe of Technical Images*], Prado sees Vilém Flusser as a "writer-thinker," whose essays are built over a strong reflection upon languages, one that is made by the process of writing itself. Flusser uses writing to think and he thinks through writing. Here Prado explores the role of fiction in Flusser's process of writing and thinking.

In "A dimensão da escrita em Vilém Flusser e Guimarães Rosa" [The dimension of writing in Vilém Flusser and Guimarães Rosa], Eliane Campos explores the short story *Fita verde no cabelo* (Green ribbon in the hair) by Guimarães Rosa and a short article about it by Vilém Flusser. Both texts were published in 1961 in the Literary Supplement of O Estado de São Paulo.

The second part of the issue contains Vilém Flusser's first full-blown text, which unfortunately remains unpublished — *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert. Versuch einer subjektiven Synthese*. It is accompanied by Clemens van Loyen's "Der mühsame Auftakt einer publizistischen Karriere: *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert. Versuch*

einer subjektiven Synthese” [The Difficult Beginning of a Journalistic Career: the Twentieth Century. An Attempt at a Subjective Synthesis]. This text is a part of van Loyen’s dissertation entitled “*Vilém Flusser in Brasilien. Eine Anthropophagie des Geistes*” [Vilém Flusser in Brazil: An Anthropophagy of the Mind] which the author relates to Rainer Guldin’s reflections on Flusser’s *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert. Versuch einer subjektiven Synthese* (see *Flusser Studies* 20), regarded by both van Loyen and Guldin as the foundational of Flusser’s thinking and further writings. Flusser’s epochal title points to historicity. However, Flusser does not pursue an objective approach to history. He assumes an anthropological introspection of the human being and examines its “products”, such as culture, language, philosophy, science, and religion. In addition, Van Loyen draws philosophical and historical connections to two existentialist thinkers, Karl Jaspers and Gustavo Corção, both mentioned as “authorities” by Flusser in a letter to Ernesto Grassi. In the last part of the article, van Loyen relates *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert* to Flusser’s book on the phenomenology of the Brazilian, *Brasilien oder die Suche nach dem neuen Menschen* and points out that Flusser was not only influenced by Hegel’s dichotomy of history and non-history, but also by notions from both Grassi’s and Keyserling’s *Südamerikanische Meditationen*. The author concludes that these ‘traditional’ notions are not uncritically adopted by Flusser, but “anthropophagically” transformed into new Brazilian ideas.

In the article “From Hegel to Zielinski: An Essay on the German Media Philosophy,” the Polish scholar Jan P. Hudzik deals with the original media philosophy emerging in the German-language since the 1980s. He describes as relevant contexts, phenomenology, social critical theory (the Frankfurt School), and deconstructionism. Starting with Hegel’s romantic vision of culture as language, and the issue of meaning as conveyed by speech and writing, this article emphasizes the role played by digital technologies in the end of twentieth century, as the so-called “medial turn” opened new ground for philosophical reflections under the aegis of *Medienphilosophie*. The presentation of this conceptual framework ends in the discussion of the methodological and philosophical devices studied by Siegfried Zielinski’s media archaeology.

Gustavo Bernardo (Rio de Janeiro) and Eva Batličková (São Paulo), May 2018