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Flusser on Writing:

The Toronto Heritage and the

Paradoxes of Writing after the End of Writing

Flusser's writings on writing

In their diverse writings, rewritings, editions, and translations, Flusser's writings on writing have seen many transformations. The book that assembles Flusser's ideas on the future of the medium of writing in a universe of images was first published in 1987 German. Its title, *Die Schrift. Hat Schreiben Zukunft?* ('Writing: Does writing have a future?'), remained the same in its Portuguese translation, which came out in 2010 (*A Escrita: Há Futuro para a Escrita?*), but its English translation of 2011 omitted the main title and, more provocatively, made its subtitle, *Does Writing Have a Future?*, the main title. The book had several precursors. The bibliography of Flusser's writings (Sanders 2002) and the site <http://flusserbrasil.com/> list the following essays, book chapters, and articles for newspapers and cultural magazines (see References):

- 1965: The love of reading and writing
- 1967: Speaking and writing
- 1978: The decline and decay of the alphabet
- 1983/1984: The future of writing
- 1985: Prescript: postscript to writing
- 1985 Writing in a universe of images
- 1986(?): Is there a future for writing?
- undated: Writing (online: http://flusserbrasil.com/arte179.pdf)
- undated: Scribere necesse est, vivere non est (online: http://flusserbrasil.com/arte155.pdf)

The book publication of 1987 was as provocative as its critical echo was mixed. A sarcastic reviewer, who may have felt Flusser's scenario of the end of writing posed a threat to his very existence as a writer, recommended that his readers give preference to the digital version of Flusser's

book because it allowed them to delete words, sentences, or maybe even whole chapters (Rauh 1987). In the long run, his scathing review turned out to be shortsighted. International scholarship thought the book not only worth reading but also translating. A second German edition followed soon after the first (1992), and translations into Hungarian (1997), Korean (1998), Portuguese (2010), and English (2011) testify to the continued interest of media scholarship in what Flusser had to say about the medium of writing.

Writing also continued to be a topic of interest of Flusser's after 1987. His manuscript "After Writing" and his interview with Miklós Peternák, published under the title "On writing, complexity and technical revolutions" date from 1988. Flusser also took up the original title of his 1987 book again in the title of a magazine article in East Berlin in 1989. Furthermore, in 1991, he wrote the chapter "The Gesture of Writing", and in 1988, an article on the phenomenology of typewriting followed under the title "Why do Typewriters Clatter?"

Curiously, a year after his book of 1987, which he had declared to be a "no-more book" (*Nichtmehrbuch*), Flusser's instrument of writing was still a mechanical typewriter. Commenting on the paradox of an author who still used a writing tool of the 19th century in times of the digital media, Zielinski and Weibel (2016: 21) noted, not without a certain tone of humorous irony, "As an intellectual author, Flusser did not necessarily have to obey his own precepts. The imperative was mostly valid for others." The same authors (ibid.) also observed, as a curiosity, that when the Nuclear Research Center Karlsruhe invited Flusser as the first German-speaking media scholar to participate in the development of a hypertext in 1989, he delivered the text of his contribution in the form of a typewritten manuscript.

Flusser's and Plato's prophecies on the future of writing

Flusser prophesized the end of writing in eschatological words, when he declared, on the back cover of the second German edition of his book of 1992, "When we are staring at a few images lightly illuminated by the setting sun of the alphabet, something new is rising behind our backs whose first beams are already touching our surroundings. Like the slaves in Plato's cave, we must turn around to defy this newcomer" (Flusser 2011: 139).

In recalling Plato's allegory of the cave after the end of writing, Flusser associated himself with a philosopher who had commented on the emergence of the alphabet in Greece in no less prophetic words than those with which Flusser, 2,400 years later, evoked its end. In his dialogue *Phaedrus*, Plato had Socrates criticized the invention of the alphabet for being a cultural technology

that would weaken the memory of future literate minds: "This invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise" (Plato 274a-b). At least for Flusser's writings on the future of writing, Plato's prophecy did not come true. So far, Flusser's book has not been forgotten. All of its editions and translations are still available and continue to be discussed internationally.

Flusser's and the Toronto School's theory of writing consciousness

Twenty-five years of reflection on the medium of writing, from Marshall McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy* of 1962 until 1987, left their marks on Flusser's conception of writing in a universe of images. Flusser was not a linguist, and he was not particularly interested in the particulars of the archeology of writing. Detailed information on this topic is not available in his book. Only *en passant* does Flusser refer to the origins of writing "three and a half millennia" ago (2011: 34) or say that it "arose from images three thousand years ago" (2011: 138). However, media archeologists today agree that the invention of writing as a system of graphic signs in regular correspondence to spoken language began no less than 5,700 years ago in Sumer (Fischer 2001: 31; Coulmas 2002).

The difference between Flusser's dates and those of the historians of writing is explained by the fact that, for Flusser, the history of writing only begins with alphabetic writing and perhaps its precursors in syllabic writing. Hence, writing, for Flusser, is synonymous with alphabetic or perhaps phonographic writing. Occasionally, he contrasts alphabetic with logographic writing, formerly called "ideographic" writing (Coulmas 2002: 40-41). The graphic signs of logographic writing, which Flusser (2011: 30-31) prefers to call "ideograms", represent words and not necessarily the sounds of their pronunciation. Although the Chinese and the Japanese cultures use this method of writing until today, Flusser disregards or considers it as archaic. By excluding logographic writing from his media theoretical horizon, Flusser can free his conception of writing from any associations with images, and thus oppose images more sharply to writing. In accordance with influential writers of the mid-century, in particular Gelb (1952), Flusser interprets the transition from pictography and logographic writing to alphabetic writing as the transition from a logically "lower" to a "higher"

stage of cultural evolution, which he interprets as a logical necessity of the evolution of culture as such: "Ideograms are signs for ideas, for images seen with the inner eye. The preservation of images, however, was exactly what writing sought to avoid. Writing set out to explain images, to explain them away. Pictorial, fanciful, imaginative thinking was to yield to conceptual, discursive, critical thinking. It was necessary to write alphabetically rather than ideographically to be able to think iconoclastically. This is the reason for denoting the sounds of a language. In speech, one talks 'about' ideas and 'about' images and, in doing so, stands above imagistic thinking, speaking down from on high" (Flusser 2011:30-31).

The origin of this conception of writing, which is criticized as Eurocentric today (e.g., Krämer 2011), is found in McLuhan's theory of writing and in the theory of writing of the "Toronto School", especially in Havelock's *Preface to Plato* (1963). McLuhan had argued as follows: "Given the phonetic alphabet with its abstraction of meaning from sound and the translation of sound into a visual code, and men were at grips with an experience that transformed them. No pictographic or ideogrammic or hieroglyphic mode of writing has the detribalizing power of the phonetic alphabet. No other kind of writing save the phonetic has ever translated man out of the possessive world of total interdependence and interrelation that is the auditory network" (McLuhan 1962: 31).

Hence, alphabetic writing was seen as the culmination point of the evolution of graphic media. The logic of the alphabet was considered not only as semiotically superior to logographic writing but also as the instrument of a superior culture. In McLuhan's words, "The detribalizing of the individual has, in the past at least, depended on an intense visual life fostered by literacy, and by literacy of the alphabetic kind alone" (1962: 43). McLuhan even went so far as to recommend the study of at least some elements of logographic writing to convince the learner of writing of the superiority of the alphabetic system: "It would be well today if children were taught a good many Chinese ideograms and Egyptian hieroglyphs as a means of enhancing their appreciation of our alphabet" (McLuhan 1962: 47). The difficulty of learning the alphabet, which is the difficulty of writing meaningless sounds in the form of meaningless letters, was a semiotic virtue for McLuhan, the virtue of dissociating or abstracting, "not only sight and sound, but separating all meaning from the sound of the letters, save so far as the meaningless letters relate to the meaningless sounds" (ibid.).

Flusser identified himself with the same conception of the superiority of alphabetic writing over logographic writing advanced by the Toronto school. In a line of argument that elevated alphabetic writing literally above the logographic one, Flusser states: "As the score of a spoken language, the alphabet permits us to stabilize and discipline a transcendence of images that has been won, with effort, through speech. One writes alphabetically to maintain and extend a level of

consciousness that is conceptual, superior to images, rather than continually falling back into pictorial thinking, as we did before writing was invented" (Flusser 2011: 31).

The key notion of this passage is "consciousness". Elsewhere in his book, Flusser (2011: 7) specifies that what he means is "writing consciousness" (*Schriftbewusstsein*). The thesis that writing created a new kind of consciousness in literate minds was the main thesis of the book *Orality and Literacy* by McLuhan's thesis supervisor, Walter J. Ong (1982). The transition from oral to literate culture "restructured" the consciousness of literate minds. It was the transition from aural to spatial consciousness, since the "commitment of the word to space enlarges the potentiality of language almost beyond measure, restructures thought, and in the process converts a certain few dialects into 'grapholects'" (Ong 1982: 7-8). With writing, "the critical and unique breakthrough into new worlds of knowledge was achieved within human consciousness […] when a coded system of visible marks was invented whereby a writer could determine the exact words that the reader would generate from the text" (1982: 84). A further cultural advance brought about by the invention of writing was the higher degree of the authors' reflexivity in the process of conceiving a message since in written messages, authors have more time to think about their message before sending it out. Ong concluded that writing enhanced reflexive awareness because "to live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but also distance. This writing provides for consciousness as nothing else does" (1997: 81).

Parallels between the Toronto School theory of the transformation of consciousness through writing and Flusser's theory of the transformation of cognition with the end of writing are remarkable, but the consequences of such transformation foreseen by Flusser were more radical than the ones Ong had imagined: "In this written reflection on writing, this "superscript", Flusser has regretfully concluded that we should expect writing to decline – for reasons that converge from various directions on this conclusion. This bundle of reasons can be summarized as follows: a new consciousness is coming into being. To express and transmit itself, it has developed codes that are not alphanumeric and has recognized the gesture of writing as an absurd act and so something from which to be free" (Flusser 2011: 107).

Aware of the Toronto thesis of the influence of writing on consciousness, Flusser set new accents in his interpretation of writing consciousness. Ong had argued that "writing makes 'words' appear similar to things because we think of words as the visible marks signaling words to decoders: we can see and touch such inscribed 'words' in texts and books. Written words are residue. Oral tradition has no such residue or deposit" (Ong 1982: 11). Members of a literate culture, therefore, see the things of their world through the glasses of writing and begin to look for correspondences

between written words and the things they denote instead of seeing the things as such irrespective of how they are represented in writing.

In the chapter "Loss of Belief" ('Glaubensverlust') of his book *Medienkultur*, Flusser also reflects on the influence of alphabetic writing on human consciousness after the end of oral culture, but in contrast to Ong, Flusser's focus is on the linearity of writing. The linear form of the newly invented media of writing had the effect that thought became equally linear, that is, "one-dimensional": "Graphic consciousness consists in the belief that things happen in a linear way [...], that it is possible to read the 'world', that is, to dissolve it into clear and distinct concepts. In short, it is the belief that the 'world' has the structure in which symbols are organized into linear codes" (1997: 38). In *Does Writing Have a Future?*, this topic becomes one of Flusser's leitmotifs: "In this first observation of writing, it is the rows, the linear flow of written signs that make the strongest impression. They make writing seem to express a one-dimensional thinking and so, too, a one-dimensional feeling – desire, judgment, and conduct – a consciousness that was able, through writing, to emerge from the dizzying circles of preliterate consciousness. We know this writing consciousness because it is our own, and we have thought and read about it" (Flusser 2011: 7).

Flusser's conception of the one-dimensionality of literate minds does not necessarily have negative connotations, insofar as he interprets linearity as a necessary prerequisite of logical thinking: "Only one who writes lines can think logically, calculate, criticize, pursue knowledge, philosophize – and conduct himself appropriately. Before that, one turned in circles" (Flusser 2011: 7). Furthermore, writing also makes historical thinking possible. "This linear alignment of signs made historical consciousness possible in the first place" (ibid.). Despite its linearity, the advantages of alphabetic writing are undeniable, even for the advocate of technical images, Vilém Flusser: "We know that the alphabet has proven to be a remarkably productive invention. It has facilitated discourse that was never achieved in nonalphabetic areas: Greek philosophy, medieval theology, the discourses of the modern sciences. Without the alphabet, there would have been no such discourses, for they are conceptual, critical discourses that detach themselves further and further from imagination, becoming more and more abstract, more unimaginable" (Flusser 2011: 31).

In this sense, Flusser anticipated the end of writing not only with skepticism but also with a dose of nostalgia and with optimism about the advent of something new. Curiously, Flusser took up again the eschatological tone of those enigmatic comments about humans in the shadows of Plato's cave in a chapter with the title "Poetry", where he wrote: "What we fear, as we anticipate the most perfect form and 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" (Flusser 2011: 77).

On the other hand, Flusser's discourse never took on a real apocalyptic tone. The end of writing does not mean the end of literary or even human culture in general. On the contrary, Flusser's vision was that of the beginning of a new cultural epoch with a new form of consciousness:

We should expect writing to decline […]: a new consciousness is coming into being. To express and transmit itself, it has developed codes that are not alphanumeric and has recognized the gesture of writing as an absurd act and so something from which to be free. […] Not the gesture of writing but the concrete actuality of writing will be the starting point (Flusser 2011: 95).

The era after alphabetic writing, Flusser believes, will be an alphanumerical one. Even the sounds of music will become calculable and calculated. "If the eye (in the form of numbers) is beginning to predominate over the ear (in the form of letters), then it will be theoretically as well as practically possible to manipulate (digitalize) auditory perception numerically. So-called computer music is only one embryonic example of it. Numbers will soon make sounds visible and images audible" (Flusser 2011: 29). In the new era following the era of linear communication, the nonlinear will predominate. It will be an era of synthetic images beyond criticism since in this era, "digital codes synthesize things that have already been fully criticized, fully calculated. Criticism in the earlier sense could discover nothing more in these images than that they were computed from electrons. If this critique tried to go further and criticize the intentions of the synthesizer, it would, in the final analysis, find only computed electrons there as well. The old criticism, this dismantling of solid things, would be lost in the gaps between intervals, in nothingness – and to no purpose at all. For it is clear at the outset that there is nothing solid to be criticized in the new" (Flusser 2011: 152) .

Despite the optimism with which he faced the end of the era of writing, Flusser remained relatively vague when it came to the details of the new digital culture. He was aware of this and justified his vagueness with the unpredictability of the future media after writing. We do not yet know "the meanings programmed by the electronic images that surround us", he wrote in 1978 (Flusser 1978b: 135), and in 1987, he spoke of the absurdity of wanting to foresee the future of the media after writing: "What is new about the new is its very indescribability, and that means that what is new about the new consists exactly in the absurdity of wanting to explain it. The Enlightenment has run its course, and there is nothing more to explain about the new. There is nothing obscure about it; it is as transparent as a net. There is nothing behind it. The Enlightenment has turned a somersault in the new. It must start to enlighten itself. The alphabet is the code of the

Enlightenment. Writing can continue only with the goal of illuminating the alphabet, describing writing. Otherwise, there is nothing more to explain and describe" (Flusser 2011: 151).

The exception concerning the unpredictability of the future of writing is poetry. With respect to poetry, Flusser foresees a future with new potentials, a poetry of participation, if not a collective poetry: "The poet who writes alphabetically writes above all and in the first instance to critics. The new poet is not facing such an audience. The models he builds are to be received, changed, and sent on. He is playing a permutation game that he received from earlier poets and that he will pass on to future poets" (2011: 76-77).

The iconic and the symbolic, the visual and the aural

Despite his praise for the alphabetic over the ideographic writing, Flusser also recognized some disadvantages of phonographic writing. Typically enough, numbers are written logographically in all languages and cultures. "6", for example, does not represent the sounds of the word "six" but the concept, the concept in its mathematical sense. The advantages of the logographic writing of numbers for mathematics are obvious.

Whereas logographic signs provide "direct access" to their meanings, alphabetic writing obliges its users to take a cognitive detour before having access to its meaning. Readers must first translate the graphic sign into a phonetic sign before they can have access to its meaning. Thus, Flusser asked: "Why, when we want to get an idea down on paper, do we take this convoluted detour through the spoken language instead of using signs for ideas, that is, ideograms, as Chinese or some new computer codes do? Is it not much easier to write '2' than 'two'? There must have been weighty reasons that led the Sumerian inventors of the alphabet to such a counterintuitive code as the one they inserted between thinking and writing" (Flusser 2011: 30).

Since our writing uses alphabetic signs mixed with numerical ones, it is a hybrid system. It is only partly a phonographic system. Partly it is also a logographic system. This is why Flusser calls the code of writing *alphanumeric*. This hybrid code combines two principles of representation, which semiotics defines as the symbolic and the diagrammatic. Numbers and words written in alphabetic letters are symbols, arbitrary signs that do not show what they represent, being based on cultural conventions only, which need to be learned. Perhaps the most arbitrary form of this hybrid method of writing is apparent in its linearity. The linearity of the medium of writing obliges the interpreting mind, used to think multidimensionally, to interpret written messages in linear ways, too. However,

according to Flusser, the arbitrariness of the principle of linearity is only characteristic of phonographic writing, not of the writing of numbers and algorithms. The numbers of algebra are not only logographs, their arrangement forms diagrammatic, that is, they form abstract icons.

What matters in the diagrammatic sign is the position of the sign in its graphic space, since in diagrams, the spatial relations between its elements represent semantic relations. Flusser's typewriter could represent only poorly the diagrammatic form of formulas: "A typewriter is built to arrange signs into lines. The resulting order is suited to letters but not to numbers – evidence that in alphanumeric code, letters have overpowered numbers. It is actually possible, with certain special moves, to make a typewriter reproduce mathematical equations or complicated formulas from physics, but it is easy to see that these signs form lines only with effort, by force. The assault on numbers by letters concerns a violation of numerical by literal thought. It concerns, that is, an important feature of thought supported by alphanumeric code, which is to say Western thought" (Flusser 2011: 23).

For Flusser, the differences between iconic or visual and symbolic or auditory coding are fundamental because the two modes of representation do not complement each other but compete and create semiotic conflicts. They are the source of antagonism between the media of writing and images. Symptomatic of this antagonism is the etymology of Indo-European words for writing, whose original meaning is 'to carve', 'to scratch', or 'to cut'. Both the English verb *to write* and the Latin *scribere* ('to write') have this root. On this premise, Flusser concludes that "the scratching stylus is an incisor, and one who writes inscriptions is an incising tiger: he tears images to pieces. Inscriptions are the torn pieces, the cadavers of images; they are images that fell victim to the murderous incisor teeth of writing [...]. So any writing is terrible by nature; it strips us of representations by images prior to writing, it rips us from the universe of images that, in our consciousness prior to writing, gave meaning to the world and to us" (2011:14).

Flusser does not hesitate to extend his judgement of "inscription (writing, as such)" as "iconoclastic" (ibid.), to the concept of information. Information, he writes, does not bring us new knowledge in the sense of positive data. On the contrary, "informing is a negative gesture, directed against the object. It digs holes into objects. It digs holes of "spirit" into things too full of themselves so that these things no longer condition the subject. It is the gesture of wanting-to-be-free from the stolid resistance objects present to subjects. The digging aspect of writing is an informative gesture that seeks to break out of the prison of the conditional, that is, to dig escape tunnels into the imprisoning walls of the objective world" (Flusser 2011: 12).

Performative paradoxes of writing about the end of writing

Writing about the end of writing as well as commenting on a book whose author pronounces the end of writing implies a series of performative paradoxes, that is, contradictions between the writer's act of writing and the contents of this writing. Paradoxes are logical dead ends, but Flusser was not a logician. His style was meant to be provocative, not logically consistent. Flusser knew that provocations call for objections. He even called for objections against his paradoxes and anticipated some of them himself. Among them are the following:

1. *The paradox of writing after writing.* Vilém Flusser's book on the end of writing was published, in its first edition, in 1987 by Immatrix Publishers in Göttingen. The title was distributed in the form of a 160-page book and alternatively in the form of two 5¼ inch disks, at that time called "floppy disks". In his Afterword to the version that appeared in 1989, at European Photography, the author expressed high hopes for the digital version of his book: "An essay is an attempt to stimulate others to reconsider, to move them to provide supplements. That is the reason this text is also to be published as a disk: it is intended to be a snowball, the initial presentation increasingly covered over by subsequent additions" (Flusser 2011: 163). Anticipating an answer to the question, "Is there a future for writing?", the publisher called the digital floppy disk version a "no-more book" ("Nicht-mehrbuch"). The irony of fate is that in contrast to the publisher's prediction, the printed version of Flusser's book did not become outdated at all. The book was reprinted in its paper form in a large print run, whereas its floppy disk version was not only soon outdated, but also illegible for newer generations of home computers.

2. *The paradox of describing the indescribable.* When Flusser writes of the "very indescribability" and the "new about the new" after the end of writing as well as of "the absurdity of wanting to explain it" (2020: 151), he makes use of the ancient performative paradox of the ἄρρητον (árreton), of the ineffable (Kreuzer 2001), since from the first to the last page of his book, he did nothing but describe the indescribable and talk about what he declared to be ineffable.

3. *The paradox of writing after the end of writing.* A variant of the paradox of the ineffable is the paradox of writing after the end of writing. The end of writing, Flusser declared, as quoted above, has made writing superfluous and even "absurd". For writers, this means the dilemma of a "current crisis of writing", whose deeper cause is that intelligent machines write better than human beings: "All writing is 'right': it is a gesture of setting up and ordering written signs. And written signs are, directly

or indirectly, signs for ideas. So writing is a gesture that aligns and arranges ideas. Anyone who writes must first have thought. And written signs are the quotation marks of right thinking. On first encounter, a hidden motive appears behind writing: one writes to set one's ideas on the right path. That is really the first impression one has in looking at written texts: exactly this order, this alignment. All writing is orderly, and that leads directly to the contemporary crisis in writing. For there is something mechanical about the ordering, the rows, and machines do this better than people do. One can leave writing, this ordering of signs, to machines. I do not mean the sort of machines we already know, for they still require a human being who, by pressing keys arranged on a keyboard, orders textual signs into lines according to rules. I mean grammar machines, artificial intelligences that take care of this order on their own. Such machines fundamentally perform not only a grammatical but also a thinking function, and as we consider the future of writing and of thinking as such, this might well give us pause for thought" (2011: 6).

Among those responsible for this paradox, Flusser identifies artificial intelligence, not because it threatens writers and readers, but precisely because it makes writing superfluous since with artificial intelligence, machines know how to write more intelligently than that human authors before the end of writing: "The ordering of ideas is a mechanical process, attributable in any case to the order of writing, and can be left to artificial intelligences [...]. So the feeling that writing is absurd, which seizes and gnaws away at many writers, cannot be attributed to superficial matters like textual inflation or the rise of more suitable codes alone. It is rather the result of becoming conscious of writing as engagement and as an expressive gesture. A glance not only at the cultural scene but above all into himself shows the writer that his hour has begun to strike" (2011: 92).

4. *The paradox of untranslatability*. The attempts to translate Flusser's work imply the paradox of translating the untranslatable. In particular, Flusser's frequent reflections on the origins of words are often untranslatable because, as Flusser said, "each and every language [...] contains within itself the wisdom accumulated by generations, whose origin is lost in the night of time" (2013: 3). Whenever translators recognized Flusser's untranslatability, they adopted the method of inserting a footnote, in which they made it clear that the translation did not correspond perfectly to the meaning of the original text. However, by inserting footnotes in Flusser's book, the translators necessarily depart from the translated original, because Flusser never used any footnotes in his writings. The style of scholarly dissertations that need footnotes to become fully intelligible was not to his taste. The paradox of the untranslatability of Flusser's 1987 book is less self-contradictory when the circumstances of the publishing history of the book are considered. Already in 1992, the book was

reissued in a second edition. As mentioned above, it was translated into Hungarian (1997), Korean (1998), Brazilian Portuguese (2010), and English (2011).

5. The paradox of writing after Flusser. Writing thirty years after the declaration of the end of writing in times in which "bibliophilia […] registers as necrophilia" (Flusser 2011: 102), Flusser implies an even stronger paradox than the one in his original declaration. However, to write the present paper on Flusser for a journal with the title *Flusser Studies* implies still another paradox – the performative paradox of writing in an academic style about an author who disliked the academic style. Flusser preferred the essay style and had little sympathy for an academic style accompanied by footnotes and bibliographies. In his "philosophical autobiography" *Bodenlos*, Flusser formulated this personal aversion against academic conventions as follows: "I must say here, however, that I have never been 'academic' in any traditional sense of the word. I could and I would never overcome my aversion to all academicism" (Flusser 1992: 221). (In the edition of the same biography for Brazilian readers, one can only read, "I never overcame my aversion to every form of academicism" (2007: 203).

6. The paradox of the book after the book. The diverse editions, re-editions, and translations of Flusser's book about the end of writing imply the paradox of the book after the book. Flusser devotes an entire chapter to this topic, but here, his prophecy about the end of writing is far less affirmative. The tone in this chapter sounds even slightly nostalgic when Flusser perplexes his readers with yet another paradox, the paradox of the book-lover who devours books like a scavenger: "Should books be replaced by memories that function better, there will be far cleverer methods of getting a look at the information stored in them than paging through.[...] The low-function possibility of turning around, choosing, or leaving things to chance, the low-function historical freedom, would be lost. We are bookworms, beings opposed to automated apparatuses and green forests, not out of bibliophilia – which today registers as necrophilia – but out of an engagement with historical freedom. [...] This sense of nourishing ourselves on corpses (books), explains our horror of dispensing with books" (Flusser 2011: 101-102).

These lines leave the reader with the impression that Flusser himself was a bookworm, a bibliophile, and by no means a necrophiliac of writing. Book readers concerned with the perspective that they might be the last in the history of the genre can find much consolation in statements Flusser added to his book in its "Afterword to the Second Edition" of 1992: "Publishing an essay is not

about proving or disproving something (as in an experiment) but about constantly rethinking eve-rything dialogically" (Flusser 2011: 177). However that may be, thirty-five years after Flusser's writings about the end of writing, there is no more doubt that the digital media, not least also digital books, have not left writing the same medium it had been before.

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