

Introduction

The thirteenth issue of *Flusser Studies* is dedicated to the reception of Vilém Flusser's work in the Spanish-speaking world. Because of the manifold dimensions of his theoretical work covering a wide array of problems that cannot be circumscribed to one thematic axis alone this reception is hopefully going to kick off extensive repercussions along the whole spectrum of contemporary philosophical thinking. The contributions of this issue should be understood as a fertile and promising dialogue that is trying to be established between areas of Flusser's thinking that are as different as they are fruitful. Such themes include the cultural crisis, the theory of technical images, media criticism, the transformations occurring in the relationship of subject and object, the rise of a new form of imagination – that Flusser calls *Einbildungskraft* –, and the figure of the *homo ludens* as the embodiment of a new kind of subject.

In his four conferences – *How to explain Art* –, translated from the Portuguese original by Andrea Soto Calderon, Vilém Flusser points to some political and social problems connected with the phenomenon of art in a post-industrialized society. The first point concerns the distinction between production and creation. In a post industrialized society the apparatus bent on mass-production focuses mainly on the making of new information discarding the moment of creation and the material side of the artistic object. The second conference deals with the distribution of artistic works. Art is more and more marginalized because no longer fundamental within a society only concerned with scientific and technical development. The new life-styles are the result of collective programming. In order to become an artist in the modern sense of the term one would have to look for new channels of distribution in order to subvert the program. The third conference deals with the reception of the work of art. Artistic messages need to become models for concrete everyday experience but this gets more and more difficult. The fourth conference, finally, deals with the political and social effects of art. The second industrial revolution has radically changed society. The distinction between private and public is slowly but inexorably being abolished. Social meeting places have been substituted by communication networks. Life is slowly being transformed in functional automatic programs. Two possibilities, however, show a way out: the different network connections are not only hierarchical but also linked with each other and a concrete experience of the world is still possible. The first way out allows for dialogue creating

information that is not pre-programmed and the second makes it possible for new information to penetrate the net. The artist is engaged in this second venture.

Marcel René Marbuger's *Chronology of a curatorial failure* – translated from the German original by Breno Onetto – focuses on Flusser's conceptual commitment to the 12th Biennial of São Paulo. Between June 1972 and March 1973 Flusser tried to put into practice his ideas for an art exhibition. For this purpose he traveled through Europe and got in touch with numerous artists and theorists, such as René Berger and Abraham A. Moles

Claudia Giannetti's *Vilém Flusser: Brazil and the search for the subject-project* offers an analysis of the relationship between the intellectual developments of Flusser's thinking during his years in Brazil and the relevance that this had in his search for a new projective concept of subject. The challenging experiences of exile and openness to the new culture have allowed him to become familiarized with the Brazilian society beyond his immigrant condition. Brazil became a philosophical project that profoundly transformed his theoretical approach with relation to a non-historical way of conceiving reality.

In the following contribution, *Bazin, Flusser and the Aesthetics of Photography*, Alberto Carrillo and Marco Calderón carry out an analysis of the aesthetics of photography comparing Vilém Flusser's approach with that of the cinema theorist André Bazin. Both writers locate the aesthetic experience within the field of the extraordinary. For Bazin the extraordinary resides in the object of photography itself which is understood as an aesthetic transformer whose power consists in its capacity to expose reality. Flusser, on the other hand, perceives photography as existentially meaningful. Technical images are a possibility to re-imagine the world endowing it with meaning.

In *Mathematics in Vilém Flusser's work* Gerardo Santana reflects about the importance of mathematics in Flusser's and his concept of the 'staircase of abstraction' implying the creation of a new type of imagination. Santana shows that Flusser tries to move beyond the traditional division between logical, mathematical knowledge and the alphabet. He gets rid of this dialectical subordination, valid for both Plato and Aristotle, and affirms that the numerical element is part of the alphabet. In this sense, he always uses the term 'alphanumeric code' suggesting that in the course of the centuries numbers have been refined in such a way that they can nowadays be used for the projection of virtual worlds.

In the next essay, *Play and Imagination in Vilém Flusser*, Andrea Soto discusses the importance of the notion of play which is absolutely essential for an understanding of Flusser's thought. This notion can be used to describe the human predicament in the early 21st century as a critical device showing that many other traditional categories have nowadays become obsolete. The notion

comes into play when analyzing the relationship of the subject to the technical appliances surrounding him and with regard to the construction of subjectivity.

In *Towards a Critique of Television Culture – Or the Mass-Media in Vilém Flusser and Günther Anders* Breno Onetto discusses the growing importance of mass-communication in the second half of the 20th century analyzing Flusser's criticism of this phenomenon and comparing it with Günther Anders's approach.

In this issue there is also a short monographic section dedicated to the dialogue that Vilém Flusser and photographer Joan Fontcuberta sustained between the 1984 and 1988. In this period they exchanged a series of letters that are of great interest for an analysis of Flusser's notion of the relationship of photography and information. These letters also provide the opportunity to study in depth the production of an artist as prolific as Fontcuberta. "*To document something which does not exist.*" *Vilém Flusser and Joan Fontcuberta: a collaboration*, written as a trans-linguistic collaboration by Andrea Soto Calderon and Rainer Guldin, not only describes Flusser's and Fontcuberta's letter exchange but also the different texts linked to this collaboration. The text also includes an interview with Fontcuberta. The articles *Releaser* and *Bibliophagus convictus*, both written by Flusser, are also included in this section. The first was intended to be published in the journal *Photovision*, which, however, never happened, and the second was written for *Artforum* in New York. For this last article Flusser had asked Fontcuberta to collaborate with a portrait of the species described in the text. This picture, however, was never taken because of lack of time.

Finally, this issue contains seven photographs by Joan Fontcuberta whom we want to thank for his kind disposition and generosity – also for granting an interview that gave sense to a lot of aspects and helped us understand better this interesting relationship.

If we had to define an axis linking the diverse contributions of this issue it would be Flusser's criticism of culture and his creation of a new thinking strategy based on the idea of a dialogical net. In Flusser's work there is a constant search for the impact and relevance of anthropological mutations. In his own terms: the rise of a new kind of human being, that, as Giannetti would put it, is related to the transformation of the subjective in a projective condition, can be interpreted as the advent of the *homo ludens* linked to the appearance of a new form of imagination that Flusser called *Einbildungskraft* to distinguish it from the older meaning of imagination. This *homo ludens* would play with the possibilities of the apparatus trying to move beyond it. In order to do this he needs techno-imagination, the ability to criticize *and* to create new technical-images. In this sense, the notion of art acquires renewed importance within Vilém Flusser's philosophical project, especially in view of a criticism of the present cultural and social situation. This amply

justifies the selection of papers presented in this issue. All of them have to do with, in a way or another, with the production, distribution and reception of techno-images, and the political and social effect this is having on our lives. Flusser would say that it is not the philosopher – as in Plato's *Republic* – but the artist that has to figure out the way to create a new city.

Andrea Soto Calderon and Breno Onetto

Barcelona (Spain) and Valdivia (Chile)

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