

Rainer Guldin Wind and Desert¹



Abbildung 1: Kolmanskuppe, Namibia

“[...] an antenna on the roof, a telephone wire through the wall, a television set instead of a window, and a garage with a car instead of a door. The formerly intact house has become a ruin, and through the cracks blows the wind of communication. [...] A new architecture, a new design is required.”²

Vilém Flusser, Riddled with holes like Emmentaler cheese

In Flusser’s work, the wind stands for an innovative, destabilizing principle that ruffles and confuses our lives. The wind, like the desert and the cloud with which it is related in many

¹ Another shorter and slightly different version of these texts was published in *Flusseriana An Intellectual Toolbox*, ed. by S. Zielinski, P. Weibel and D. Irrgang, Univocal, Minneapolis 2015, p. 438-441 and 136.139. A German version was previously published in Rainer Guldin, Spuren jüdischen Denkens in Vilém Flussers Werk, *Flusser Studies* 26. <http://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/guldin-spuren-des-judischen-in-vilem-flussers-werk.pdf>.

² „[...] auf dem Dach die Antenne, durch die Mauer der Telefondraht, statt Fenster das Fernsehen, und statt Tür die Garage mit dem Auto. Das heile Haus wurde zur Ruine, durch deren Risse der Wind der Kommunikation bläst. [...] Eine neue Architektur, ein neues Design ist vonnöten.“ Vilém Flusser, Durchlöchert wie ein Emmentaler <https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Durchloechert-wie-ein-Emmentaler-34> [accessed 4.5.2020].

ways, is a metaphor for the current general bottomlessness of our existence. The communication revolution has turned us into nomads. Not only do the national states crumble, our four walls are also showing cracks and holes. The reality surrounding us and our own identity have dissolved into a nebulous fog floating in nothingness. For nomads, the wind is what the earth is for sedentary people. Sedentary people feel bothered and threatened by the wind, it makes them uncomfortable as they cannot catch it. They can perceive it, but not understand it. The wind has something ghostly about it like the clouds. It disintegrates, disintegrates and disperses, only to reassemble and pile up again. The wind stands for a new universe, a nebulous world made up of dots that shakes our belief in the solidity of things. Settled people crawl into their four walls to get away from the wind. Nomads, however, exist in the wind. The nomads' wandering meandering paths through the desert and the steppe is related to the cloud and the wind. The storm of the media have perforated the walls and roofs of our houses. The perfect stable house, in which we have lived for many generations, has become a ruin due to the communication revolution and the multiple cables and cracks through which the wind of communication is continuously blowing. New forms of existence are therefore required: the roof of the house is being destroyed by the wind, but the tent swells and expands like a sail in the wind ready to fly on and off. Tent roofs flutter in an undefined zone between immanence and transcendence. The new wind that has risen hurricane-like around us has also risen enormously within ourselves, and so much that we experience it as a principle of a new world and a new way of life. However, there is still another dimension to the wind. It is a creative, non-material principle that permeates and enlivens reality as a whole like the breath of God: *pneuma*, *spiritus*, *ruach*. In Hebrew, *ruach* means both wind and breath. Today one would speak of *software* and intangible immaterial culture.

The desert is a significant node in a metaphorical network of concepts through which Vilém Flusser contemplates the potential ramifications of new technologies originating from the computer. Other nodes in the network are nomadism, tent, wind, cloud, sand³, dune, scattering, gathering and computing. However, this also includes the communication revolution and the zero-dimensional point-like universe of numbers that has become possible thanks to computers and calculation. Flusser uses the metaphor of the desert not only to think about alternative worlds designed by the computer and the status of reality, but

³ Compare Anne Popiel's contribution in this issue of *Flusser Studies*.

also to rethink our new existential situation. He compares the punctiform pixel worlds that appear on computer screens with grains of sand that can be reunited, merged and compressed by computational assemblage. The desert wind always stratifies the sand of the wandering dunes. It whirls grains of sand through the air, swarms of zero-dimensional particles that accumulate in heaps. The emigration of the numbers from the alphanumeric code and the pixel like world it stands for allude to the exodus of the Jews and their nomadic years of wandering in the Sinai desert. With the beginning of the communication revolution, we broke out of and away from sedentary life and entered a new, second phase of nomadism, which is characterized by a multidirectional roaming. Those who live in the desert live in *Bodenlosigkeit*. Instead of living in a stable, self-contained house with walls and a roof, he lives in mobile tents. Instead of the stable imprisoning walls of houses, tents are made of fluctuating canvases that turn solidity and certainty into immateriality and doubt. Tent walls are walls made of wind. Sails fluttering in the air. The tent-wall blowing in the wind collects and processes the incoming information transforming the tent into a creative nest.

