

Introduction

The present issue of *Flusser Studies*, which consists of three separate parts, celebrates the centennial of Vilém Flusser's birthday. In view of the current health crisis that has been addressed by some of the contributors in part one, Flusser's vision of a global telematic society of dialogically interconnected people gains in actuality. A series of other events planned in the Flusser Archive in Berlin and in Flusser's last place of residence in Robion had also to be postponed and transferred online. Celebrating Flusser's legacy online is an answer to our existence in spatial isolation and temporary confinement and to the flaring up of the renewed self-centredness and egoism of national states, many seemingly concerned only with their own interests.

Four short videos in German – one at the outset (“Mein Denkstil ist satirisch”), one at the end (“Warum ich auf Deutsch publiziere”), and two in between the three parts (“Weshalb ich nicht zitiere” and “Übersetzung und Rhythmus”) – frame and structure the issue. They have been recently posted by Andreas Müller-Pohle and show Edith and Vilém Flusser engaged in a conversation with Andreas Müller-Pohle and Volker Rapsch, which took place in August 1988 during the Kornhaus-Seminar in Weiler im Allgäu.

The first part “Vilém Flusser May 1920 – May 2020” consists of twenty-two personal contributions in Portuguese, English, German and Italian from a wide array of scholars and artists from different countries – Brazil, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the United States, Great Britain, France, the Netherlands and Austria. They are united here in their common interest in the work and life of Vilém Flusser, and in the evidence they provide that his thought is still alive and influential across the disciplines. We have arranged the contributors alphabetically, thus creating interesting juxtapositions both with regard to language and subject: The reader is invited to jump from text to text and language to language, moving back and forth between the single contributions. Such a movement might resemble that of the knight in the game of chess, the diagonal surprising and upsetting Rösselsprung, so dear to Flusser -- himself a passionate chess player -- that Vera Schwamborn singles out in her bilingual contribution as the most adequate description of Vilém Flusser's thinking process.

Gustavo Bernardo, “100 anos de Vilém Flusser” / Tom Bieling, “Fact and Fiction – Design as a Search for Reality on the Circuit of Lies” / Eszter Biró, “Chasing Flusser, Chasing Subjectivity: The Resistance of Family Photographs” / Lizzie Calligas, “Light and Dark” / Giorgio Cipolletta,

“Un acrostico per Flusser sul pensiero foto-grafico” / Noé Cuéllar, “Emptiness Transfer. Does Post-Historical Fiction Time Travel?” / Olaf Dammann, “Science as Cultural Activity” / Hannah Downing, “Fingertips and Touchscreens” / Gabriel Figueiredo, “Flusser como educador” / Michael Hanke, “Reading Flusser” / Daniel Irrgang, “Telepresence and the decay of private space (in times of crisis)” / Marc Lenot, “Why has Flusser been important for me?” / Lavinia Marin, “Functionaries of the Internet: sharing and posting misinformation online” / Pablo B. Markin, “Vilém Flusser’s relevance to contemporary cultural studies” / Siegfried Molan-Grinner, “Wohin und zurück in der Bodenlosigkeit” / Anne Laure Oberson, “Flusser as ‘Envisionary’” / Nancy Roth, “Uncharted Waters” / Vera Schwamborn, “Dem Tod Schönheit entgegenwerfen / Throwing beauty towards death” / Andreas Ströhl, “Flusser zum Hundertsten” / Flávio Tonnetti, “Viagens entre amigos” / Detlev von Graeve, “Flusser wäre dieses Jahr Hundert geworden und die Menschen haben Hausarrest” / Mercedes Wagner, “Über weites Wasser”. A few authors have also contributed pictures and text-scans: Eszter Biró, Lizzie Calligas, Giorgio Cipolletta, Noé Cuéllar, Hannah Downing, Siegfried Molan-Grinner, Andreas Ströhl and Vera Schwamborn.

Part II: Buddhism, Yoga, Sand, Clouds, Pixels and Bits explores a vast philosophical and metaphorical territory in Flusser’s work and thinking that extends from the very first book *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert* to the *Into the Universe of Technical Images*. Some of the possible connections have been visualized in the two graphics “Leere / Emptiness.”

In “Entering the Black Box: Flusser and Indian Philosophy”, Anita Jóri and Camila Mozzini-Alister highlight the most important thoughts on Vilém Flusser’s connections to Indian Philosophy. In order to trace back Indian philosophical influences on his writings, they analyze *The History of the Devil* and *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis* as well as some letters Flusser exchanged with Dora Ferreira da Silva and Alex Bloch with a specific focus on Yoga Philosophy. In the course of his life, Flusser changed his view of Eastern philosophy: at times he praised Eastern Wisdom, sometimes he opposed it. The essay also deals with Flusser’s personal approach to Yoga, and how this influenced his writings. Two of the documents mentioned in the essay have been added for the reader. “Atemübungen¹ / Breathing exercises” is a letter written on March 30, 1982 in Portuguese, containing a series of instructions meant specifically for Flusser himself on how to practice Yoga. “Yoga como ciência” is an excerpt from a *História do Diabo* that deals with the relationship between Yoga and Western sciences.

Sal Randolph’s “Mountains and Clouds: Flusser’s Buddhism” describes Flusser’s encounter with Zen Buddhism in the 1950s through his friend Alex Bloch who was assistant to a Zen monk.

¹ The title „Atemübungen” must have been added later by Edith Flusser judging from the writing.

The essay engages in the contradictory project of exploring Flusser's Buddhism both from within his writing and from the outside, through Buddhist texts Flusser would not have read. Flusser's phenomenological essay "Mountains" from *Natural: Mind* is read against the work of Chinese poet Du Fu and Zen master Eihei Dogen, and the distinction between nothingness and emptiness is considered. In order to create a silent dialogue between text and image five photographs of the Fujiyama from Masanao Abe² have been juxtaposed to Randolph's contribution.

In „Die Dimension der Leere. Vedanta und Buddhismus in Vilém Flussers *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert und Bodenlos*“, Rainer Guldin retraces Flusser's changing attitude towards Eastern philosophy, focusing on the notion of emptiness which anticipates, in a way, the later notion of zero dimensionality. The corresponding chapter from *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert*, "Das Weltbild der Vedanta" has been added for the curious reader. In „Wind and Desert,“ Rainer Guldin explores further dimensions of the metaphorical field which has been recaptured in the graphic "Emptiness".³

The following text, "Sand", is an excerpt from Anne Popiel's inspiring book *Of Pixels and Particles. The digital connection between nature and art in Vilém Flusser's philosophy* published in 2012. The book explores metaphorical connections between sand grains, droplets, bits, pixels and particles, linking the ocean of the Vampyroteuthis to moving sand dunes and the screen of the computer. "Flusser's response to groundlessness is to create one's own ground out of thin air, modeled by oceans, squids, spider webs and sand" (Popiel 2012: 14). His "metaphors translating sand grains into pixels and wind turbulence into algorithms highlight the digital structures present in both nature and computer technology that create an environment conducive to the spontaneous emergence of new order" (ibid.:54).

Rainer Guldin's essay, „Eine Wolke von Zukunft“: Zur nubigenen Einbildungskraft in Vilém Flussers Werk" starts out from Flusser's use of the metaphor of the cloud as a possible representation of our present condition. Our identity and the world around us have lost all solidity and turned into groundless swarms of particles. This vision accompanies the short history of the cloud that follows, moving from its conception as a changeable veil masking the true light of inner truth, to an assemblage with frayed and constantly changing outlines, a formless but significant stain, and a field of possibility. As Flusser points out, when dealing with present day digital technology, one has the impression that our imaging power (*Einbildungskraft*) has emigrated from our brains and become independent so that one can have a look at one's own dreams. One would have to enter into a kind of dialogue (*Zwiegespräch*) between our own imaging capacity and the imagination that

² The photographs are from Helmut Völter's book *The Movement of Clouds around Mount Fuji Photographed and Filmed by Masanao Abe* published in 2016 by Spector Books in Leipzig.

³ A German version of this text has already been 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>.

we have been feeding into the computer, in order to pave the way for a jump into a completely new form of *Einbildungskraft*.

In „Spotlyrics / NonDigitColors“, Jürgen Ostarhild presents his NonDigitColors project, which is based on a text by Vilém Flusser from 1991, “The Emigration of Numbers from the Alphanumeric Code.” In this text, Flusser evokes, among other things, the fall of the alphabet: “The alphabet is about to be crushed by numbers on the one hand and images on the other hand, as by a pair of pliers.” The RGB (red-green-blue) system that determines color on most computer screens is hexadecimal: from sixteen available characters, it uses a six-character string to deliver any individual color, preceded by a pound sign (#). The project NonDigitColors uses a code of 6 letters: a, b, c, d, e, f to make up character strings. There are 46656 different permutations, or words or signs that become color values by the addition of the # sign. NonDigitColors are computer color codes that, paradoxically, do not consist of numbers. When the numbers “emigrate” from the hexadecimal code, only the “non-digital” codes remain. The project Spotlyrics refutes Flusser’s above-mentioned assertion and reclaims a place for letters in a modern, computerized, future-oriented world.

Finally, the third and last part of the issue consists of five contributions that explore in an innovative way Flusser’s contribution to theoretical fields other than the theme of the issue.

“The Fourth Meaning of the Image: Flusser’s Invitation to Envision the World” by Anne-Laure Oberson, who has also contribute a short text for part I, is composed of excerpts from her doctoral thesis *Image as Articulation of Thought*. It focuses on Vilém Flusser’s inputs on the subject of the technical image and the necessity of becoming active participants in the illusory world we are now living in.

In “Por uma fenomenologia do corpo”, Camila Mozzini-Alister seeks to respond to Flusser’s call for a “phenomenology of the body”. The first section examines Flusser’s letter to Dora Ferreira da Silva, in which he talks about the urgent need for a phenomenology of the body; the second identifies the necessary elements for the realization of a phenomenology of the body; the third section considers the ways academic territories would have to be redefined to accommodate a phenomenology of the body from a Flusserian perspective; finally, the fourth section takes other, newer phenomenologies of the body into consideration in an effort to grasp the urgency of Flusser’s request

Peter Zhang’s “Rethinking Interology with Flusser” is motivated as much by a deep concern with the rapidly evolving human condition as by intellectual curiosity. The article reveals the prob-

lem-driven and futurological nature of Flusserian interology. It proposes that compared to traditional ontology, the notion of interality and the dynamics of interology offer us a more adequate way of thinking through our situation in the here and now and in the immediate future.

In “Flusser and Descartes. The Unremitting Mindfulness of Thinking and Being”, Wanderley Dias da Silva explores the lifelong effects of the Cartesian doubt on Vilém Flusser’s thinking. Of course, Flusser’s critique is not mainstream, and we can even hear traces of Heidegger’s voice in the background. Still, Flusser’s objection is unique and interesting, making it a refreshing alternative in the scholarly discussion of Descartes. One aim of the paper is to turn the sword of Flusser’s critique of the Cartesian doubt against Descartes’ own detractors.

Last but not least, Miguel Ángel Benítez Rando’s “Liberta y poshistoria en la filosofía de la fotografía de Vilém Flusser” retraces Flusser’s thoughts on freedom and history as they appear in his philosophy of photography. The essay deals with the function of the author of a photograph in relation to apparatuses and programs and extends to the activity of the spectator and everyone who interacts with images.

Finally, we would like to thank Elisa Brunelli and the other members of the Web Service team at the Università della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano (Switzerland) for their precious work over all these years. Without their commitment and expertise *Flusser Studies* would not have been possible.

Rainer Guldin (Lugano and Vienna) and Nancy Roth (Penryn), May 2020