

Gabriel Philipson

**SEISMIC CIST: Vilém Flusser’s Journalistic Philosophical Quasi-Poetry and Oswald de Andrade’s *Telefonemas* in the Corpus of Brazilian Philosophy**

Er [Einwanderer] wird zum Epizentrum eines Erdbebens, das von den Ureinwohnern als ein Umsturz des Gewohnten erlebt wird.

[Flusser 1994: 106]

**Oswald de Andrade and the University of São Paulo in the 1950s**

AO MINISTRO DA EDUCAÇÃO

(De São Paulo) – [...] Concluiu-se a Congregação dessa Faculdade [de Filosofia da Universidade de São Paulo] a fim de anular ou invalidar a inscrição de três candidatos a esse concurso, admitindo que somente possa nele figurar um concorrente, portanto, sem perigo de perder a cátedra. Acontece que o beneficiado é um homem digno que não precisa de tal favoritismo. É ele o professor João Cruz Costa, que exerce a cadeira como substituto e que com certeza enfrentaria vantajosamente não três, mas uma dúzia de candidatos.

O Conselho Universitário daqui mandou que se fizesse o concurso com os quatro candidatos inscritos legitimamente, entre os quais eu figuro. Mas, a congregação recorreu e depende da solução de v. excia.

Trata-se, como se afirma, de mais uma da “bucha” de licenciados que deseja absorver para si todos os cargos universitários.  
Sem mais.

Oswald de Andrade

11 out. 1953<sup>1</sup> [Andrade 1996: 394]

Oswald de Andrade’s name generally does not arise in such a context as this: a telegram letter published as “Telefonema” in the newspaper *Correio da Manhã* for “crânio, como se diz em gíria apologética”, “v. excia. Sr. Antonio Balbino”.<sup>2</sup> Oswald de Andrade and his anthropophagy more often figure in what, at best, adopts an anti-colonialist and anti-nationalist perspective, rising up as a discourse against the State, developing the Law in the footsteps of Kafka and Benjamin (Sterzi

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<sup>1</sup> “TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

(From São Paulo) – The Board of this Faculty [of Philosophy of the University of São Paulo] has been conspiring to cancel or invalidate the registration of three candidates for this examination, declaring that only one candidate may appear, therefore, without danger of losing the chair. It turns out that the beneficiary is a worthy man who does not need such favoritism. He is Professor João Cruz Costa, who holds the chair as a substitute and would certainly face not three, but a dozen candidates.

The University Council has ordered the selection process to be done with the four legitimately registered candidates, among whom I figure. But the Board has appealed and depends on you to resolve the issue.

It is, as we say, another one of the “hash” of graduates who wish to absorb for themselves all the university positions. Sincerely,

Oswald de Andrade October 11th, 1953” (All translations by Gabriel Philipson unless otherwise noted).

<sup>2</sup> “The brainy, as it is said in apologetic slang, your excellence Mr. Antonio Balbino.”

2018). They also provide support for reversing the criteria of the paradigm of European metropolitan culture and for addressing the anthropological challenge. Or, from a de-nationalizing and de-oswaldializing perspective that attempts to indicate its actual relevance and power, anthropophagy is seen as a strategy used in political, economic and cultural contexts by those who “generally” are at the most disadvantaged pole (Castro Rocha 2011: 666).

At worst, however, Oswald de Andrade is also spoken of as someone who: “[...] was neither a Tupi nor a Jabuti. Instead, [as someone] full of good Portuguese feelings [...or as] those middle-class, narrow-minded and naturally mediocre Brazilian tourists (or academic tourists) who go to Europe or the United States with the pretension of being the intact and erotically powerful children of Mother Nature.” (Gumbrecht 2011: 293)

Or, not from the perspective of the European or North American intellectual who so happily agrees to write about Oswald de Andrade (Gumbrecht 2011: 297), but from the perspective of the indigenous and Black genocide of the colonization process in Brazil,<sup>3</sup> Oswald de Andrade and anthropophagy appear as agents of an internal colonialism that “claims Brazilian originality for themselves before any indigenous, Black or northeastern person could do so” (Cardoso 2018: 118). As such, it would not be difficult to read in this “phone call” the clear intention of taking advantage of the press spot he had when denouncing what he considered a “marmelada[racket]” in a public competition for the position of university professor:<sup>4</sup> “V. excia., no alto palanque em

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<sup>3</sup> Although his proposal is ideally associated with an ode to matriarchy, it has also proved to be phallogocentric from a feminist reading, which has shown, to put it in other words, how his sexual plentifulness is similar to the anarchism of anarcho-capitalists: by criticizing bourgeois sexual values, his liberation does not question ultimately the phallus, but rather ends up affirming it (see more in Oliveira 2011).

<sup>4</sup> For a description of this competition that caused a stir in the history of “university autonomy” and the relations between Largo São Francisco (Faculty of Law) and Maria Antônia (Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters), strangely without mentioning the name of Oswald de Andrade, which would complicate and entangle the description of the conquest of autonomy by raising the problem of endogeny disguised as autonomy (Costa 2008): “When Maugüé returned to France, [João Cruz Costa] was nominated, together with Livio Teixeira, to assume the Chair of Philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters of the University of São Paulo. The competition to provide this Chair caused a stir that lasted for years. Several candidates enrolled, including João Cruz Costa who had already held the position. The others came from the Faculty of Law or did not have a higher education degree. The competitions for the Chair and Free Teaching for higher education courses followed the regulations according to the Decree-Law 13.426 of June 23, 1945.

According to this decree, (...) it also allowed the registration of candidates not holding higher education diplomas. The previous competitions fulfilled this criterion. However, Law 851 of 10/07/49 changed the situation that had been in force until then. It determined that boards with less than 2/3 of permanent professors should be completed with university professors from similar establishments as long as they were of Notorious Knowledge, with activities and works published in the Chair specialty in competition. With this measure the autonomy of the Faculty was assured for the purpose of the competition. Another change: the candidates should have a university degree in which the Chair of Philosophy, then in competition, should be included. (...) Faced with this odd decision, the Faculty of Philosophy protested and appealed to the Minister of Education and Public Health and the egregious National Council of Education. In May, by unanimous vote, the petition was approved. In October, the Board of the Faculty considered only João Cruz Costa enrolled.

(...) Four years after the registration of this contest was opened, it happened. (...) Between May 24 and 28, 1954, the written exams, title trials, thesis defense (The Development of Philosophy in Brazil in the 19th Century and the National Historical Evolution) and the didactic exams were held. It was approved with distinction and the Director,

que se encontra, não está sabendo o que se passa entre a arraia miúda que o cerca e com certeza ignora que há alguns anos já, funciona o que também em gíria se chama de uma “marmelada” para impedir a realização correta de um concurso na Faculdade de Filosofia da Universidade de São Paulo” (Andrade 1996: 394)<sup>5</sup>.

The questions that emerge from this quote, however, diverge from the reasons for which his name has been mentioned: why would someone like Oswald de Andrade need to write and publish a text like this? Why would he ever need to go through the embarrassment of a public competition without a diploma in the subject? Wouldn't the newly founded University of São Paulo be interested in incorporating the virulence and originality of anthropophagy? Furthermore, isn't São Paulo University (USP) supposed to be involved in the formation of an intelligentsia in the country that could compete with the international one? And wouldn't anthropophagy be a meaningful expression of that, to say the least?

The answer usually follows quickly and briefly. First there is the historical context: we are in the middle of Getúlio Vargas' second term as president of Brazil which then ended tragically on August 24 in the following year. São Paulo University was the Paulista reaction to Vargas' victory against them, that were in crisis after the end of the coffee cycle due to the New York stock market crash. The university was almost 18 years old, and it was trying to establish itself institutionally in the nation. The humanities in general and philosophy in particular were established in opposition to the “modernist intellectuals”, whom they considered not, or not very rigorous, “dilettantes”. Oswald de Andrade had already tried two other public competitions,<sup>6</sup> both without success, the first for a chair in Brazilian literature, and the other, four years earlier, which had generated the writing of the famous essay *Crisis of messianic philosophy*.

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Eurípides Simões de Paula, communicated the result to the Magnificent Rector requesting arrangements for the nomination of Professor João Cruz Costa for the position of Full Time Professor, with his contract for the interim regency of the same Chair terminated.”

<sup>5</sup> “Your Excellency, in the high place where you are, is not aware of what is going on among the small people that surrounds you and certainly ignores that for some years now, works what is also called in jargon a ‘racket’ to prevent the correct realization of a competition in the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of São Paulo”.

<sup>6</sup> Although, regarding this first competition, Oswald refers on July 16, 1949 to himself as “Livre Docente de Literatura da Faculdade de Filhos da Universidade de São Paulo. Recebi o título junto com Antônio Cândido and Jamil Almansur Haddad” [I took the title together with Antônio Cândido and Jamil Almansur Haddad] (Oswald 1996: 308). *Livre Docente* is a university title near to Habilitation or Associate Professor. I would also like to mention how this moment of the university and its confrontation with “modernist intellectuality” was described by a sociologist from USP in the words of Oliveira (2009, 69): “[... ] university - an atmosphere that, it is worth remembering, in the mid-1950s, was beginning to take its first steps towards a process of institutionalization that would mark the Usonian intellectual field. Guided by scientific criteria that would culminate in the demand for ‘academic standards’ imposed on the elaboration of ideas, as well shown by sociologist Maria Arminda do Nascimento Arruda, the university would create ‘institutional conditions for the production of knowledge’, bringing together a significant number of intellectuals and thus transforming the ‘criteria for the production of knowledge’ - criteria that would demand of new generations an ‘autonomous’, ‘universalist’ and ‘scientific’ philosophical project, in opposition to the dilettantism and amateurism of modernist intellectuals.”

From this general overview, the answer follows: it is hard to clearly distinguish between what is a power conflict among São Paulo's own elite and the actual methodological or theoretical disputes. But Oswald de Andrade was then considered as someone from the previous generation, a dilettante modernist, not up to date with the new demands and requirements of the public services. His ambition to become a university professor reveals, meanwhile, an esteem for the university and its growing reputation within the intellectual life of the nation, contrasting with his decadence and relative ostracism.

As for the “phone call” mentioned above, his journalistic activity had not provided him with the desired luck – interestingly, this was perhaps precisely because he was a journalist. The machinery of university physiologism, in its “racket” operation, “wanted to absorb for itself all university positions” as written in the newspaper the person who was the very incarnation of the kind of philosophical understanding that was to be avoided in the Usipian milieu. Oswald de Andrade's “doctrinal writing” crossed and blurred the barriers between the philosophical, the literary and the journalistic (one of the meanings of dilettantism and amateurism?). And it was precisely that which at the time seemed inappropriate to those who were concerned with the consolidation of a specifically philosophical university machinery in the country.

But João Cruz Costa himself, whose name later became that of the union of philosophy students, would also be questioned by his university peers for being too journalistic. As is known, journalism is occasionally regarded as the exact opposite to the authenticity of what would be philosophical (even more, we must say, in these times of Sartreianism and existentialism).

Thus, although nowadays anthropophagy appears to be part of domestic colonialism on the basis of decolonial perspectives (what, in fact, one could also attribute to university philosophy of the time [see Philipson 2020]), his philosophical project may be regarded as too virulent and radical for the project that was being established by another part of the elite in the public University of São Paulo. If such a project manages to survive and lead paths toward the current impasses, perhaps “de-oswaldized and de-nationalized”, as a future of the past, it might then be understood as a kind of virulence of the philosophy that exposed the (neo)colonial power relations of its institutionalization process.

By considering the anthropological challenge in earnest, Oswald de Andrade, indeed, makes a cultural appropriation of the indigenous (Cardoso 2018: 115),<sup>7</sup> but in doing so he also contradicts

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<sup>7</sup> Not exactly the pre-cabraline Amerindian, but the one of Montagne, Rousseau and Freud – for the theory of matriarchy that Oswald speaks of comes from Freud's writings. This fact implies that, if the problem of the use of Oswald's theoretical approach is to be discussed, one should begin by referring to Freud. In this sense, it is interesting to say that Oswald, from a Flusserian point of view, would play the image of the savage against his forger. However, in doing so from Brazil, it is symptomatic that he did not relate to the indigenous struggles of his time - on the contrary, he

the European discourse about the savage. Hence, his anthropophagy may become a strategic tool that surpasses both his own project and character.

The philosophical university industry complex, however, has not denied Oswald de Andrade's project for what it had of domestic colonialism. It was actually just the opposite of that, since an even worse domestic colonialism occurred in the philosophy undertaken at the University. For instance, precisely by just negating the very possibility of existence of philosophy in Brazil before the installation of the university. The project of establishing a philosophical technology at the University should thereby be seen as conservative in relation to the project of Oswald's anthropophagy, although in some instances it is possible and even necessary to criticize the latter.

His "phone call" published in the newspaper to the Minister of Education about the in-breeding collusion of the "chatoboy" reveals the complexity of the relationships of subalternity and colonization of his activity in the philosophical field "in formation". By not having an ear for Oswald de Andrade's activity, the technological part of university philosophy that was installed in São Paulo and consequently in the country not only avoided the colonial question, but also surrendered it hand in hand to the nationalism of the worst kind, which would have consequences up to the present day. It is relevant that today in general there is still no policy of racial and ethnic quotas in the most traditional postgraduate courses in philosophy in São Paulo, and in general in the south-southeast <sup>8</sup>, unlike other areas of the humanities. If this movement of this philosophy of power needs to be understood in a much more complex way, as from its relationship with Brazilian and American neo-Nazi groups, among other aspects, here I am specifically interested in revisiting some of the decisive moments of the constitution of philosophy in Brazil to review its possibilities.

### **Flusser as an *Unheimlicher Einwanderer* in the *Aufschreibesystem* 1960 in São Paulo**

Flusser's public or "engaged" activity in Brazil would begin in 1963, almost a decade after Oswald de Andrade's death, just one year before the Military Coup. Although Flusser did not explicitly quote Oswald de Andrade's work until 1970, when he rewrote his 1967 text in German on Brazilian philosophy, it is possible to notice, in his newspaper texts over the 1960s, some links that deserve closer consideration.

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even encamped Marshal Rondon's project. That is why I understand the power of the de-oswaldization of anthropophagy proposed by Rocha (id.), since its denationalization already seems to be contained in itself, at least in the readings of Sterzi (2018) and Nodari (2015) (see Cardoso 2018: 115f.).

<sup>8</sup> If the Philosophy Department of USP is the only one with a maximum grade of 7 in the last four-year evaluation of CAPES in 2017 (BRAZIL 2017), among the graduate programs in philosophy evaluated with grades 6 and 7, only the ones of UFMG and UFRJ planned in the selection processes of 2020 quotas in graduate studies. No wonder, these are philosophy departments that can be said to have historically competed with the one of USP. See: Brazil, 2017.

Oswald de Andrade uses his space in the newspaper to elaborate his reflections and to risk philosophical suggestions. His thought was not one of “careful delimitation of problems and suppositions, nor of these long reasoning links’ [which according to Benedito Nunes would characterize] the philosophy *stricto sensu*” (Nunes 1978: lii), but one that thought by making “image links that connect the dense poetic intuitiveness to the schematized philosophical conceptualization, ahead of any system and a little beyond pure artistic creation”. In his newspaper texts one can witness, in a diffuse but more systematic way, the consolidation of his philosophical readings of authors like Sartre, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, alongside chronicles and reflections from everyday life (Chalmers 1992: 36-40).

As if it were the transcript speech of a character calling in from his location, accompanied by the dash sign, his phone calls create a character who needs the dialogue to produce his own repertoire of readings, commentaries and opinions.

In “The Confessional Diary” of December 2, 1949, for instance, Oswald’s phone call echoes the first newspaper piece *Waiting for Kafka* by Flusser published in 1963, when he writes: “(De São Paulo) – O mundo moderno se debate entre Kafka e Pirandello. [...] Somos todos mais ou menos personagens d’ “Processo” de Kafka. Não sabemos nunca se quem bate à nossa porta é o vendedor de enceradeira – uma solução Cocteau – ou, o que é mais certo, o capucho que nos vai levar à guilhotina. Sob o signo da intranquilidade e da desavença, o mundo muda. Não para o otimismo cretino anunciado por Leibnitz. Para o otimismo sanguinário das fogueiras soviéticas que querem de novo salvar a nossa alma. [...] Enquanto não se esfacular em sangue a espinha dorsal das certezas messiânicas, sob o aspecto do salvacionismo ou do “melhor dos mundos”, pagaremos caro nossas infantis ilusões, nossa crença e nosso amor. E seremos devorados na dialética do absurdo<sup>9</sup>” (Oswald 1996: 321).

It is possible to observe how his “texts” are gradually taking shape by broadcasting in the public space: linking “the stupid optimism announced by Leibnitz” with “Soviet bonfires” and his peculiar notion of messianism, he foresees a future far worse than the *carnavalesco* to be expected from Oswald de Andrade, known by having wrote that “joy is the proof by nines”. A future of the past in which an oblique “us” is eaten up in the midst of the “dialectics of the absurd” - and we

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<sup>9</sup> “(From São Paulo) - The modern world struggles between Kafka and Pirandello. (...) All of us are a bit like Kafka’s “The Process” characters. We never know if the person who knocks on our door is the wax machine salesman – a Cocteau solution – or, more likely, the hooded man that will take us to the guillotine. Beneath the sign of uneasiness and disagreement, the world changes. Not into the cretinous optimism announced by Leibnitz. Towards the bloodthirsty optimism of the Soviet bonfires that want again to save our soul. (...) Until the backbone of the messianic certainties is crumbled in blood, from the aspect of Salvationism or the “best of the worlds”, we will pay a high price for our childish illusions, our belief and our love. And we will be eaten up in the dialectics of absurdity.”

could devote a lot of effort to analyze who would be the (historical?) subject that eats up that oblique community in this “absurd dialectic”.

In what is not really a diary, but rather a phone conversation between colleagues or comrades, Oswald de Andrade updates us about the political, philosophical, existential, poetic or artistic issues that drive him daily. The telephone, and no longer the diary, appears as a symbol of the wish for technological modernity in a newspaper text, indeed quite corny, as the reference to the television device in the *Anthropophagist Manifesto* (see Gumbrecht 2011).

In his turn, Flusser’s work is more diffuse, and his published texts comprise only part of his writings that have already been called “philosophical fictions”<sup>10</sup>: in form, they are short texts written in several languages, a few poems, some dialogues, and some in the form of satires or parodies with philosophical contents or morals; however, not all of them ready to be published in newspapers.

“Pedirei neste artigo ao leitor uma façanha digna dos mágicos mais poderosos: pedirei que se transforme (pelo menos na sua imaginação) em sal de cozinha”.<sup>11</sup> (Flusser 1998: 29) Vilém Flusser began with this appeal a 1964 article published in *O Estado de São Paulo*, entitled “O mito do cubo” (*The Myth of the Cube*). Many of the procedures that mark the best part of the philosophical fictions of this extremely versatile author can explicitly be seen here, although he is sometimes accused of superficiality. On the one hand, the provocation by the invocation of certain ironical magic and certain idea of magic in a serious newspaper column; on the other hand, the demand for the displacement of the “point of view” of the philosophical subject for, in this case, a non-human object that participates, in a technical way, in our day-to-day life. In other cases, it is the Vampyroteuthis Infernalis, god, the embryo, the solitary, Martians, typists, illiterate, among others, the other subjects for whom Flusser asks us to adopt their perspectives of existence.

It is possible to see this displacement of world views as a central procedure not only of his philosophical fiction, but also of his philosophy and his fiction – if it is possible to separate them. In this displacement which opens up to a struggle of dissonant and different voices and perspectives, a common ground is maintained, guaranteeing that each world view can recognize its voice in the words said by the mouths (or corresponding organs) of the others. It is through this dislo-

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<sup>10</sup> Flusser (1970c) used as a subtitle to “Do laser” the expression “philosophical fantasy” in parentheses. In several versions to be found in the Flusser Archiv Berlin. Today, perhaps we could think it based on the concept of philosophical fiction, “a free ethnocosmological speculation”, about which Danowski /Viveiros de Castro (2015) and Marco Antônio Valentim (2018: 242 and 243-251) speak when interpreting Szendy’s (2011) Kantian proposition about the existence of extraterrestrials.

<sup>11</sup> “I will ask in this article to the reader for a feat worthy of the most powerful magicians: I will ask him to transform himself (at least in his imagination) into cooking salt.”

cation of voices and perspectives that Flusser seeks to expose the predetermination of these theories, their naivety, their excessive Europeanity or excessive humanity in their desire to become hegemonic, in their claim of being neutral and universal discourses.

Still in “O mito do cubo” (“The myth of the cube”), Flusser unravels the request to the displacement of world view to the reader, relativizing the notion of reality in a Nietzschean way: “The world of ‘reality’ is nothing more than an imperfectly rigorous creation of imagination. The request made to the reader is, in short, to substitute this not so rigorous world of ‘reality’ for another, much simpler and more apt to be more rigorous.” (Flusser 1998: 29). This appeal to a world of imagination, ironically more rigorous in comparison to other comic procedures of his fictionally philosophical writing, may suggest something childish in his fiction. But perhaps this childishness can be understood in the sense of a permanent connection with the world and with philosophical questions – childishness that maintains Flusser in Nietzschean soil –, which he used to call the taste of thinking.

In “Um mundo fabuloso” (“A fabulous world”), an article published in the same Paulist newspaper, in the same (fateful) year of 1964, in November, after the Military Coup, he compares his philosophical fictions with the fables of La Fontaine which might be used to teach French. However, if the fables of La Fontaine may have the function of framing, normalizing and moralizing children and new generations according to traditional and bourgeois educational models – whether by the enchantment, the marvelous or the fantasy –, the fables of Flusser would be, for an existentialist, inadequate for children, once they are philosophical, insofar as they promote negative experience. More than generating disenchantment given by the magical enchantment, his philosophical fictions do not understand education as an adaptation to a set of values previously given and accepted by a certain community as unlikely to be modified, but rather they convey their own skeptical ethics, the ethics of the relativization of theories and sciences, the ethics of the displacement of perspectives, of the breakdown of high and low levels that at times characterize the philosophical discourse – what is done precisely by the existentialist phenomenology that approaches the philosophical problems of everyday life, one of the reasons why Flusser would approach it, perhaps leading to its most extreme comic consequences.

At the same time, Flusser, on the one hand, did not despise scientific knowledge. He always tried to integrate the latest news of science. On the other hand, he acted as if looking for the metaphysical limits of these theories, as if they were apparatuses to be deprogrammed. In order for his fables to work against these apparatuses created by thought itself, Flusser existentialized the logicism, Darwinized the Existentialism, Freudianized the Existentialism, Darwinized..., etc. In this comic game, which also served as a way of approaching its reader and its interlocutor, it is the human being – if we still are humans – and its current existence that is at stake, as in the fables of



La Fontaine. In order to learn who we are, for Flusser, it is necessarily to open up to others, which, however, no science is capable of doing. Only the philosophical-fictional digression is able to handle it – this is the irony with the notion of rigorousness and the Nietzschean criticism of the notion of reality.

In a Nietzschean way – but at the same time against Nietzsche –, Flusser exposes the charming character of the philosophical discourse in the comic superficiality of his treatment of philosophical questions. He also exposes himself “deep down” as a mere magician capable of doing tricks: by inferring the superficiality of the light treatment of philosophical themes in articles with few lines in the newspaper, by the exhaustive repetition of themes and passages, by the translation and retranslation of ideas in new articles and in other languages, he exposes himself as someone deserving of reflexive criticism, as a mere point of view among other possible ones. Thus, he indicates to the reader that he should not take the author as the proponent of a doctrine or of serious considerations to be adopted and repeated. On the contrary, he suggests that readers should distance themselves.

Flusser did not talk about any theory if he did not want to disrupt it as he did with the apparatus. For this reason, his formal strategy in these philosophical fictions is similar to a player or a magician. He presents expressions that are difficult to understand by a non-expert audience – secularism that Flusser also claims for himself – to attract their curiosity. The title of this article, also from 1964, is an example of this strategy: “5...C x B?” [five suspension points C versus B interrogation point]. In the first sentence, he writes that it is “a Portuguese chess phrase” and then explains what it means: “No quinto lance de uma dada partida o cavalo preto come o bispo branco. Na opinião do comentarista da partida, isto representa um erro cometido pelo jogador”.<sup>12</sup> (Flusser 1998: 45) The article is, however, about possible interpretations of this phrase, which seems to be both enigmatic and technical, by perspectives so different that they go from a Martian to an illiterate. Although, however, apparently Flusser is speaking about language, philosophy or chess, here it seems to be, more than anything else, the very form of his own writing that is stimulating his thought and his writing. In this sense, Flusser makes in a certain way, the attempt to analyze himself as an apparatus, looking for the limits of his own writing technique.

In this way, he begins to analyze the different attitudes that these characters have to the existentialist question, “What does human life mean?”. These different attitudes maintain a connection with the variant postures of these distinctive points of view in relation to their interpretations of the meaning of the enigmatic chess phrase that is the title of this article. Thus, he caricatures different metaphysical positions, suggesting a difference in the degree of radicalism and depth

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<sup>12</sup> “In the fifth move of a given game the black knight [C] captures the white bishop [B]. In the opinion of the commentator, this represents a mistake.”

of the positions that are being overcome or contained in the others. After listing the different positions of these characters about the question of the meaning of life, he refuses to say which of these viewpoints is the most certain one. Flusser then invokes the reader himself to take such a judgment, since he implies the reader in his “fable” by using the first-person plural, saying that “todos nós, sabemos ou não, estamos representando uma das quatro atitudes”<sup>13</sup> (Flusser 1998: 49). Flusser himself stands inside the painting he represents, while at the same time speaking from a skeptical distance about what he has just sketched in the last few lines: “O presente artigo não procurou esconder sua afinidade com o analfabeto, embora tenha procurado superá-la ironicamente. A honestidade do datilógrafo, a beleza das teorias do marciano e a certeza do enxadrista são vedadas ao presente articulista, porque as considera ‘insignificantes’. Mas nada tem a oferecer em compensação, a não ser a ignorância e o temor do mistério de tudo.”<sup>14</sup> (Flusser 1998: 49)

### ***Exilphilosophie: addressing the question of the reception of a philosophy***

Maybe it is not without a reason that Flusser’s considerations on the very form of his texts and his activities date back to the same period of his encounter with the philosophy of Oswald de Andrade. In October 1970 in São Paulo Flusser wrote a never-published introduction to the book *Coisas que me cercam*, a collection of essays published in Brazilian newspapers that would be edited in French without this introduction as his fourth book. In this unpublished introduction, he shows his concern with the self-determination and mastering of a unique form in his minor texts by reflecting on the connections he made so far between philosophy, poetry and journalism: “(...) o veículo jornalístico é adequado à minha maneira de pensar, e articula muito bem os problemas filosóficos que me preocupam. (...) O que é certo, no entanto, é que minha visão do filosofar é anti-acadêmica a ponto de clamar por articulação do tipo que o jornalismo facilita. Porque a minha visão do filosofar é esta: filosofar é viver filosofia, e viver filosofia é vêr filosofia em tudo que me cerca, por mais efêmero e cotidiano que seja. Em outras palavras: filosofar é vêr filosofia naquilo do qual tratam jornais e revistas. E, no entanto, ao reler os artigos que perfazem esta coletânea, creio dever constatar x não são jornalísticos no sentido comum do termo. Embora tenham a estrutura de artigos de jornal e revista, não têm nem o vocabulário nem o estilo que a rigor caracteriza tais mensagens. São resultados da tentativa de transformar artigos em veículos para a filosofia. A saber:

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<sup>13</sup> “All of us, whether we know it or not, are representing one of the four attitudes.”

<sup>14</sup> “The present article did not seek to hide its affinity with the illiterate, yet it has tried to overcome it ironically. The honesty of the typist, the beauty of the Martian theories and the certainty of the chess player are forbidden to the present writer, because he considers them ‘insignificant’. But it’s not that he has anything to offer in compensation, it’s only the ignorance and fear of the mystery of everything.”

para uma determinada filosofia, para a qual o estilo é pelo menos tão importante quanto o é a informação transmitida. Creio pois que estes artigos querem ser lidos não como peças jornalísticas que são, mas quase como se fossem poesia.”<sup>15</sup> (Flusser 1970b: 1)

Two years later, it would be simplified and reused in the supposed first column of *Posto Zero* at Folha de São Paulo. Here he removed the discussion on the relations between philosophy, journalism and poetry or literature, but added the problem of the reception of his texts: “Para que tal engajamento alcance parcialmente a meta, deve quem publica não apenas assumir a responsabilidade por suas idéias, mas ainda tratar com que as idéias digam respeito a seus leitores. Isto é: deve respeitá-los. E lees [sic!], por sua vez, devem abrir-se às ideias que lhe são propostas. (...) Se um leitor ou outro reagir às ideias propostas, será atingida a situação ótima visada. (...) E desafio alguns leitores para colaborarem nela”<sup>16</sup> (Flusser 1972: 1).

Whereas João Cruz Costa himself, who was to win the nomination for the philosophy chair for which Oswald was effectively prevented from applying<sup>17</sup>, was to be reproached by his fellows for being less of a philosopher than a journalist, a label he was never able to escape in his entire

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<sup>15</sup> “(...) the journalistic vehicle suits my way of thinking and articulates very well the philosophical problems that concern me. (...) What is certain, however, is that my view of philosophizing is anti-academic to the extent that it calls for the sort of articulation that journalism facilitates. Because my vision of philosophizing is this: philosophizing is living philosophy, and living philosophy is seeing philosophy in everything that surrounds me, however ephemeral and ordinary it may be. In other words: philosophizing is seeing philosophy in what newspapers and magazines are all about. And yet, when I revisit the articles that compose this collection, I think I should note that they are not journalistic in the common sense of the word. Although they have the structure of newspaper and magazine articles, they have neither the vocabulary nor the style that rigorously characterizes such messages. They are the results of the attempt to transform articles into vehicles for philosophy. Namely, for a certain philosophy, for which style is at least as important as the information transmitted. I therefore believe that these articles want to be read not as the journalistic pieces they are, but quasi as if they were poetry.”

<sup>16</sup> “If such engagement is to partially achieve its goal, it is necessary that those who publish not only take responsibility for their ideas, but also make sure that these ideas concern their readers. In other words, they [the authors] must respect them. And they [the audience], in turn, must be open to the ideas submitted to them. (...) If one reader or another reacts to the ideas that have been submitted, the optimum situation will be achieved. (...) And I challenge some readers to collaborate in it.”

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, he himself was a critic of the philosophy practiced in Brazil, “cousa de Padre”, as quoted by Oliveira (2009: 72) in a letter from Cruz Costa: “O diretor convidou-me para fazer concurso em setembro de 45. Naturalmente aceitei, pois não podia dar parte de fraco. Não quero bancar o corajoso, mas creio que hei de ter grandes dificuldades e que talvez chegue mesmo a dizer adeus aos meus amigos. V. sabe, filosofia cá na terra ainda é coisa de padre. Enfim, irei até ver em que dão as cousas. Se não der certo, far-se-á outra cousa. O Brasil é grande.” (“The director invited me to take part in the competition in September 1945. Of course, I accepted this invitation, since I could not show any weakness. I don’t want to play the brave, but I think I’ll have a hard time and maybe even say goodbye to my friends. You know, philosophy here in this country is still a priest’s thing. Anyway, I’ll go and see what happens. If it doesn’t work out, there would be another thing. Brazil is huge.”) Based on Bourdieu, Oliveira (2009: 72) interprets this letter as “on the one hand, [revealing of] the political and administrative power gathered by João Cruz Costa within the Faculty of Philosophy, on the other hand [as corroborating] and perhaps [helping] to explain his intellectual fragility with regard to the production and reception of his work in this particular milieu”. With this, Oliveira follows the scientism prejudice, without realizing that Cruz Costa’s sublimated self-critical introjection would be more of a symptom than a diagnosis. However, Cruz Costa’s insecurity combined with his “political and administrative power” accounts for the excitement of the competition that marked that period of the university. Finally, neither Bento Prado Jr. nor Paulo Arantes dedicate themselves to this remarkable moment of João Cruz Costa’s philosophical “trajectory” when dealing with the problem of philosophy in Brazil from Cruz Costa’s perspective.

life, Flusser stresses here his journalistic propensity. He underlines thus the importance of articulating philosophy, journalism and poetry, by believing that these connections could be a possible response of the contemporary crisis of philosophy. As if it were not enough, he did it by articulating an effective reception to the reader.

Moreover, right at the same period he wrote his first text on philosophy in Brazil for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, published on January 3, 1967, in a text commissioned by the provocative question, “o que é literatura de vanguarda?” (“What is Brazilian avant-garde literature?”) of January 1, 1967, Flusser made a strange detour. Namely, he asserts that, in order to address Brazilian avant-garde literature, it would be necessary to turn the gaze “para a literatura filosófica, um segmento fundamental, embora subdesenvolvido da literatura brasileira” (“towards philosophical literature, a fundamental, albeit underdeveloped, segment of Brazilian literature”). He then comments on the limited amount of philosophy in Brazil in comparison with the audacity of its literature: “A literatura brasileira, muito mais audaciosa, avançou muito além, e vê-se abandonada pelas suas fontes filosóficas das quais deveria ter brotado. Em consequência, busca a sua justificativa, muitas vezes “post hoc”, em filosofias que lhe são parcialmente estranhas.”<sup>18</sup> (Flusser 1967: 1).

Flusser then dedicates himself to a compliment of Ferreira da Silva, who died the year before, as “um esforço isolado” (“an isolated effort”) and “ilustração de uma filosofia geradora de literatura, porque demonstra, mesmo num esboço superficial, as potencialidades de uma literatura brasileira genuína”<sup>19</sup> (Flusser 1967: 1). It is true that he here already criticizes the “almost entirely pessimistic” conclusions of Ferreira da Silva, whom he would later consider to be his theoretical averse and the major trigger of his thinking at that time as his most absolute contrary (see Flusser 2007); meaning that he was a thinker with strong Nazi-fascist and unethical characteristics. Nevertheless, some of these epithets that Flusser bestows on him will be reserved, in 1970, for Oswald de Andrade (“isolierte Figur seiner Generation” [“isolated figure of his generation”] [Flusser 1970a]), who, in effect, had attended Ferreira da Silva’s circle when Oswald de Andrade quit the communist party activity.

Therefore, if Vicente Ferreira da Silva can be considered a link of life between Oswald de Andrade and Vilém Flusser, it could be said that the encounter between de Andrade and Flusser would have occurred after this text. In other words, since this first attempt by Flusser to write about Brazilian philosophy, Oswald de Andrade was in his horizon, even though he did not acknowledge it.

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<sup>18</sup> “Brazilian literature, as being much more audacious, has advanced far beyond, and finds itself abandoned by its philosophical sources from which it should have arisen. As a result, it seeks its justification, often ‘post hoc’, in philosophies that are partly foreign to it.”

<sup>19</sup> “An illustration of a philosophy that generates literature, because it demonstrates, even in a superficial sketch, the potentialities of a genuine Brazilian literature.”

Flusser could not be more wrong in his laudatory diagnosis of Ferreira da Silva in the continuation of “Literatura brasileira de vanguarda?” (“Brazilian avant-garde literature?”), when he states that “a obra de Vicente Ferreira da Silva é, em verdade, um esforço isolado. Mas há indícios de uma nova mentalidade filosófica a quebrar as algemas das ortodoxias”<sup>20</sup> (Flusser 1967: 2). Then, however, he finally enters into the controversy of university philosophy by addressing the limitation of “philosophical speculation” in Brazil. His diagnosis, extremely mistaken, is that there would be increased political commitment on the part of the students.

If Flusser expressed himself against political engagement and university life in this essay, in fact it wouldn’t take long for him to shift his position by also attempting to engage with the technologists of university philosophy. As Bento Prado Jr. (1999) recounts, Flusser was present in 1965 when Foucault visited the University of São Paulo and called it the French Overseas Department. On April 30, 1969, after meeting Giannotti, João Cruz Costa’s successor, in an event shortly after the public discussion they had about Wittgenstein’s translation (today Giannotti says that Flusser was correct in his criticism), Flusser (1969) sent Giannotti a letter about being curious and extremely embarrassed.

Giannotti’s answer to this appealing piece never arrived. Giannotti seemed to have taken the public review of his translation personally. Despite the embarrassment of the letter, here the university philosophy formation cycle is concluded: it avoids public debate and direct confrontation, preferring to remain silent and to engage in the “rackets” of public competitions. The consequence has been a deterioration of its social function, cloistered in its internal disputes through which it flourished in a physiological incubator.

Flusser’s appealing piece, in turn, seems at first sight a confession that would later be confirmed: realizing the complex situation in which he placed himself, since the Military Coup of 1964, with such friendships (like the one with Vicente Ferreira da Silva) that projected him even more into the Brazilian sphere, but that associated him, like a “clown” (Bernado & Guldin 2017: 177)<sup>21</sup> with the dictatorial government, it is possible that Flusser would glimpse an alternative to his destiny in the expectation of a reconciliation with Giannotti.

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<sup>20</sup> “The work of Vicente Ferreira da Silva is, in fact, an isolated effort. But there is evidence of a new philosophical mentality breaking the chains of orthodoxy.”

<sup>21</sup> Although here Flusser may refer more to his frustrated attempt to organize the São Paulo Biennial, I consider that the strength of the clown image comes from a broader context, namely, all his Brazilian engagement. My suggestion, when analyzing Flusser’s texts on Brazilian philosophy, is that it is possible to perceive a widening and, if not a turning point, at least a change in the horizon of Flusser’s expectations in the controversy between the Uspian philosophers and those of the Brazilian Institute of Philosophy. But it was already too late, after Institutional Act 5, at the climax of the Military Dictatorship. Ultimately, it is this, which remains unspoken in his written and rewritten texts, and in his letters, that drives him out of Brazil in 1972. The correspondence between Flusser and Miguel Reale, for example, as a whole is indicative of these never well resolved nodes. It is worth remembering that in an interview with Izabella Kestler (2003: 96; 2009: 108), Edith Flusser mentions the persecution of the dictatorship and the suspension of Flusser’s newspaper column, “Posto Zero”, as reasons for their immigration back to Europe.

With respect to the question of reception, Flusser's philosophical work is centered on such a possibility of dialogue with the most distinct or opposite partners, which in other contexts or situations could involve the character of the devil or the *Vampyrotheutis Infernalis*. While the strategy of the university philosophy, as outlined by Paulo Arantes, was the formation of itself (Philipson 2020), one finds in Flusser and Oswald de Andrade, based on an analysis of their newspaper articles, a different strategy regarding otherness.

It is possible, then, that Flusser was the only one to consistently confront the authoritarian positions of his masters, Vicente Ferreira da Silva and Miguel Reale. Even if the links he had established with them and the benefits he obtained from them may be questionable, he himself does not deny that such positions are nevertheless a symptomatic phenomenon of the Brazilian system of inscription (*Aufschreibesystem*), and he further criticizes them in several places.

The central permanence of the question of reception can be seen when it is noticed that Flusser returns in another key to this question of the relationship between otherness and philosophy a decade later, in a letter of November 26, 1980 to Roberto Gomes, author of *Crítica da razão tupiniquim* (*Critique of Tupiniquim Reason*). Flusser concludes his letter announcing a well-merited retreat of dialoging intellectuals, "as you and I", in the context of the emergence of a truly "Tupiniquim thought" that was not only the ideology of the Western bourgeoisie at the outpost called "Brazil". In this passage Flusser expresses a rare self-awareness of his own place in the horizon of expectation of the historical course of thought in the world: "escrevo tudo isso (...) porque creio que este é o momento para diálogos 'sine ira et studio', antes que um terremoto varra da cena todos esses dialogantes como o é o sr. e eu. E o faça merecidamente"<sup>22</sup> (Flusser 1980: 3).

The appropriateness and desirability of the earthquake that removes the people who make dialogues suggests an understanding of philosophy and literature as a field of preparation and expectation of an emergence of another "humanity" that did not have in its program *shoab* and colonialism. This may be where there might be a possibility for philosophy.

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<sup>22</sup> "I write all this (...) because I believe that this is the time for 'sine ira et studio' dialogues, before an earthquake sweeps out all those people who make dialogues like you and me. And do it deservedly."

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