
Introduction

Flusseriana – An Intellectual Toolbox

Siegfried Zielinski and Peter Weibel

“The mystical has no rationale, is in permanent exile, wanders around, and is never at rest.”¹

Amador Vega y Esquerria

“[S]ynthetic images as an answer to Auschwitz”² – the combative dialogician Vilém Flusser was very fond of pointed comments that would polarize. After making such a statement, which he often underlined with vigorous gestures and pathos, he would lean back contentedly in his chair for a moment and watch the reactions of the people he was talking to. Now he was quite sure that they would enter into a debate with him. For Flusser, proposition and objection generated excitement; not in order to arrive at a synthesis in the sense of Hegelian dialectics (Flusser was not a dialectical thinker), but to open a space for thought in which a rich fabric of arguments, positions, views, and even tricks and maneuvers could be spread out.

There’s a lot behind the statement of Flusser’s quoted at the beginning of this text. Apart from the sheer provocation it represents, it can be interpreted as the most brutal summary of what occupied this intellectual from Prague in the diaspora, what he thought, wrote, and lived (in that order). The inconceivable event that was the Holocaust, understood by many of his intellectual Jewish fellow sufferers as sacrosanct and untouchable and whose ontology ruled out the possibility of poetry for Theodor W. Adorno, is juxtaposed in this statement with a profane phenomenon. However, with this phenomenon Flusser was not only referencing technically generated image realities in the narrow sense of visual systems. The synthetic or technical image, terms he used synonymously, was a categorical surrogate for what to him constituted the aftermath of Auschwitz and the other death camps. The synthetic or technical image stands for the totality of all phenomena that can be created by numbers and their systematic arrangement in algorithmic commands. Poems, novels, plays, films, and photographs all continued to be possible after Auschwitz (Flusser worked on some himself), but they should be presented to the human senses only after being subjected to radical abstraction; a passage through the zero dimension as the medium for a new appropriation of the world. Emptying the channels first was for Flusser the precondition for filling their connections with new content and reinventing them as a system of networks. As the originator of this idea Flusser did not necessarily have to abide by it himself. The imperative held good above all for others (artists). Flusser wrote his monograph about writing, which was published both as a book, and on disk as an additional medium of storage and dialogue, on a mechanical typewriter. When Flusser became the first German-speaking communications researcher to be invited by the Karlsruhe Nuclear Research Center to construct a hypertext in 1989, he delivered the documents as a typescript.³

The rhetorical figure of the *tabula rasa* was part of the basic intellectual equipment of critical artists, writers, and scientists after the cataclysms of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, and after a world war in which German tyranny was responsible for the death of at least fifty million people. Vilém Flusser used the *tabula rasa* unhesitatingly and emphatically. Everything must be rethought fundamentally in a different way – and as fast as possible, for the juggernaut that is technologizing and cyberneticizing

¹ Amador Vega y Esquerria, “Mysticism,” in: Claudia Giannetti (ed.), *AnArchive(s). Eine minimale Enzyklopädie zur Archäologie und Variantologie der Künste und Medien | A Minimal Encyclopedia on Archaeology of the Arts and Media*, Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art, Oldenburg, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2014, pp. 119–120, here p. 119.

² Quotation from the interview “On Religion, Memory, and Synthetic Image,” which is on the DVD with booklet “*We Shall Survive in the Memory of Others*” Vilém Flusser, C3 Center for Culture and Communication Foundation, Budapest (ed.), in collaboration with the Vilém Flusser Archive, Berlin, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2010, p. 35.

³ See: Vilém Flusser, *Does Writing Have a Future?*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, London, 2011. The lecture “Schreiben für Publizieren” [Writing for Publishing], which was used by Bernd Wingert and his team to develop a prototype for the hypertext, was held by Flusser on March 2, 1989 at the Karlsruhe Nuclear Research Center. Both of these electronic texts have been reconstructed and restored for the exhibition *Without Ground – Vilém Flusser and the Arts* at the ZKM | Karlsruhe (2015) and at the Academy of the Arts, Berlin (2015/2016).

⁴ Here we mention only those who were an influence on Vilém Flusser up to and into the 1950s, when he began to write in São Paulo.

⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” in: *Prisms*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, London, 1981, pp. 17–34, here p. 34.

⁶ Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian*, Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, IL, 1996, pp. 130–131.

⁷ Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, The Modern Library, New York, 1956, p. 1.

conditions and the individuals within them, through which the world will be redesigned, is already traveling full steam ahead. Time is of the essence in reacting to this situation, and it is crucial to think even faster unconventionally; and without unnecessary academic baggage. Flusser not only led the life of a nomad, having been compelled to flee his native Prague in 1939 because of the Nazi invasion and occupation. He also rejected the traditional academic disciplines and subjects: ever roaming and roving and not adhering to a particular academic discipline aptly characterizes both his life and his work. Nomadology instead of ontology was Flusser's maxim. And these two characteristics are also shared by many of the people who initiated and advanced thinking about media in the twentieth century, for example, Aleksei Gastev, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Sigfried Giedion, Norbert Wiener, John Cage, Iannis Xenakis, and Günther Anders.⁴

Auschwitz – as a synonym for the extermination machinery of the Nazis – can be understood as inconceivable and as indescribable, and even beyond comprehension. Adorno's famous comment reinforced this position: "Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today."⁵ The first and preeminent scholar of the Holocaust, Raul Hilberg, on the other hand, took a realistic view or "functionalist" position. In *The Politics of Memory* (1996) he said: "[...] a can of Zyklon gas, with which the Jews were killed in Auschwitz and Maydanek. I would have liked to see a *single* can mounted on a pedestal in a small room, with no other objects between the walls, as the epitome of Adolf Hitler's Germany, just as a vase of Euphronios was shown at one time all by itself in the Metropolitan Museum of Art as one of the supreme artifacts of Greek antiquity."⁶

For Adorno the Holocaust meant the end of art's ability to represent, that is, the end of mimesis, which avant-garde artists, including Kazimir Malevich and Alexander Rodchenko, had already called for between the wars. Hilberg, however, was of the opinion that even the worst atrocities were potentially describable and historically explicable; thus by extension he argued that art *is* capable of representation. Hilberg's position was akin to what realism is in the arts. Flusser's position is provocative because he proposes a third alternative: to step beyond representation and reality into the techno-imaginary, into the densification of a synthetic image. Artificial art made by humans and machines, art not created by humans alone, seemed to Flusser a fitting response to the utter failure of humans and humanism given the horrific reality of Auschwitz. It is not a coincidence that one of the twentieth century's greatest novels was written by a Jew from Prague: *The Trial* by Franz Kafka (German original published in 1925). It is about a man who is arrested and prosecuted but the nature of his crime is never revealed: "Someone must have traduced Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning."⁷

Vilém Flusser's philosophy and aesthetics did not content itself with utilizing the conventional strategies of representation and realism; what he demanded was the construction of a new, an alternative world. He described this world as a "technical universe" and imagined a future within the space of possibilities offered by "synthetic images."

On closer scrutiny, however, the gesture of wiping the slate clean and the new circumstances and situations that would possibly result, is not as radical as Flusser attested. Taken individually, there is hardly a single concept that he brought into play in the interdiscursive game between science and art, between philosophy and technology that is original. He was a master of the startling adaptation, of deductions and derivations, and of reshuffling the most significant cards that have guided and laid out the intellectual history of Europe over the last two and a half thousand years, and the cultural history of Brazil after World War II.

Interdiscursivity, which allows individual discourses to crisscross and transgress each other, was an important method employed by the philosopher, historian, and social theorist Michel Foucault; his early works on mental illness (1954), madness (1961), on the clinic (1963), and on the origins of the human sciences, *The Order of Things* (1966),⁸ were written in France at around the same time that Flusser was writing his first texts in São Paulo. That the world and reality are basically communicated via various systems of symbols and important conventions, Flusser had learned through closely studying the works of Ernst Cassirer, whose philosophical texts on language, symbols and myth, and the phenomenology of knowledge were published between 1923 and 1929.⁹ Also “the tragedy of culture,” the realization that “world history [...] is not the place of good fortune”¹⁰ but instead the idea (for Flusser it is the text, the language), Cassirer discussed incisively in exile in 1942. This originates from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. From Friedrich Nietzsche Flusser took his rejection of all objective truths. And other important Nietzschean concepts, such as the reference to post-history, the abyss, and the eternal return (or eternal recurrence), can be found in Flusser’s micro-universe along with Nietzsche’s favored forms of style and text: the short essay, autobiographical notes, thought-provoking aphorisms, and specific games with fictional genres.

Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language, Martin Heidegger’s existential ontology, and Edmund Husserl’s radical phenomenology were combined by Flusser – according to situation and subject under consideration – with varying prioritizations into a dense fabric of neo-existentialist critique of technology and culture with a phenomenological thrust. Erwin Schrödinger’s reactivation of ancient Greek thinkers, particularly the pre-Socratics, in view of the catastrophes of Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, was most probably familiar to Flusser from the encyclopedia series edited by Ernesto Grassi and published by Rowohlt, of which Flusser was an avid reader in São Paulo (he would have dearly liked to contribute to the series himself). A further volume in this series was Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* – a topos that Flusser extended paradigmatically to all possible actions and activities in post-history.¹¹

That under the “new perspectives” culture has to be conceived of as the *philosophy of technology* was formulated in 1877 by the Hegelian philosopher Ernst Kapp in a splendid book. It also contains a brilliant heuristic of projection (as “organ projection”) long before the ideas were taken up by Marshall McLuhan and Vilém Flusser.¹² As an elaborated aesthetic concept with the goal of arriving at a new realm of concreteness by first passing through abstraction, the Russian avant-garde of

⁸ See: Michel Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, Harper & Row, New York, 1976 [French original 1954]; *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1965 [French original 1961]; *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1973 [French original 1963]; *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1970 [French original 1966].

⁹ See: Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1952.

¹⁰ Ernst Cassirer, “Study 5: The ‘Tragedy of Culture,’” in: *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2000, pp. 103–127, here p. 103 (previously translated in 1961 as *The Logic of the Humanities*).

¹¹ See: Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1944 [Dutch original 1938]. Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* is not included in the philosopher’s traveling library at the Vilém Flusser Archive at the Berlin University of the Arts, but it appears in Flusser’s bibliographies of *Die Geschichte des Teufels* (European Photography, Göttingen, 1993; English edition: *The History of the Devil*, Univocal Publishing, Minneapolis, MN, 2014) and the unpublished manuscript *Das zwanzigste Jahrhundert* [The Twentieth Century] (1957). These bibliographical lists have not been published and are held in the Vilém Flusser Archive in Berlin.

¹² See: Ernst Kapp, *Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Kultur aus neuen Gesichtspunkten*, George Westermann, Braunschweig, 1877. The motto of the book on the half title is: “The entire history of humankind, when scrutinized closely, resolves itself into the history of inventing ever better tools.” (Edmund Reitlinger; translated from the German)

¹³ “Projectionism aims to create a new system of developing society, a new formation of future humans – ‘the human creative’.” Quotation by the Moscow Nikritin expert Lubov Pchelkina in her entry on “Projectionism,” in: Giannetti 2014, pp. 135–137, here pp. 136–137.

¹⁴ Flusser’s contribution to the conference, “Two Approaches to the Phenomenon, Television,” was published in: Douglas Davies and Allison Simmons (eds.), *The New Television: A Public/Private Art*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, London, 1977, pp. 234–247. In Flusser’s notes on the conference held in the Vilém Flusser Archive, there are also notes on the lecture given by Hans Magnus Enzensberger.

¹⁵ For a detailed account see: Agnes Husslein-Arco and Alfred Weidinger (eds.), *Peter Weibel. Medienrebell. Warnung! Diese Ausstellung kann ihr Leben verändern*, exhib. cat., 21er Haus, Vienna, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2015.

¹⁶ For example, in the biography Vilém Flusser wrote himself in 1969, which was only published seven years later, “Em Busca de Significado” [In Search of Meaning], translated into German by Edith Flusser and Vera Schwamborn for *European Photography* magazine, online: www.equivalence.com/labor/lab_vf_autobio.shtml, 04/03/2015.

¹⁷ Harun Farocki, “Vilém Flusser: Das Universum der technischen Bilder,” in: *Zelluloid*, no. 25, Summer 1987, pp. 77–80, here p. 80; translated from the German.

¹⁸ Hans Paeschke, editor of the journal *Merkur*, letter to Vilém Flusser, August 12, 1990, quoted in: Silvia Wagnermaier, “Nachwort,” in: Vilém Flusser, *Kommunikologie weiter denken. Die Bochumer Vorlesungen*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 2009, p. 275; translated from the German.

the 1920s launched the Projectionist art movement in which Solomon Borisovich Nikritin played a leading role.¹³

A paradigm of telematics in terms of media politics and media theory that is oriented on dialogue and thus on network connections – as opposed to the Fascist “bundling” of centralized broadcasting – was elaborated and proposed by Bertolt Brecht in the late 1920s in his lucid and provocative (in terms of political economy) work on the radio as an apparatus of communication. In the Arbeiter-Radio-Bewegung [Workers’ Radio Movement] of the Weimar Republic it was already established as a paradigm for the media. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, whom Flusser met in 1974 at a legendary conference on the future of television, *Open Circuits*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York,¹⁴ took up these concepts for the construction of his theoretical media toolbox to activate the subversive potential of the media. Artists confronted the necessity of not being mere agents of fulfilling technological rationale by engaging in committed work against the apparatuses. This stance was a striking feature of the first avant-garde between the two World Wars as was the aesthetic gesture of radically exaggerating function in the sense of functioning as a defined algorithm or program (Aleksei Gastev) and organizing aesthetic practice in cooperatives (Kinoki, Dziga Vertov’s cinema collective). And immediately after World War II the neo-avant-garde developed not only theories and practices of new music (Theodor W. Adorno, John Cage, Pierre Schaeffer, Pierre Henry, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis, and others), as well as entire aesthetics based on informatics and cybernetics (Max Bense, Abraham A. Moles), they also outdid each other in criticizing and deconstructing the techno-imaginary, which was in the process of establishing itself on a massive scale – from the early typewriter ideograms of Claus Bremer and Eugen Gomringer, the *Dé-collage* actions of Fluxus (for instance, Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell), the TV guerilla from California (Ant Farm) to the “Selten gehörte Musik” [Rarely Heard Music] and the poetic and bizarre performances of Austrian Actionists (such as H. C. Artmann, Friedrich Achleitner, Gerhard Rühm, Oswald Wiener, Arnulf Rainer with Dieter Roth from Switzerland) and the “media rebellions” of Peter Weibel.¹⁵

Franz Kafka’s filigree poetic construct of the absurd, Jean-Paul Sartre’s epic existentialism, the radical staging of the young John Cassavetes’s existentialism, the influence of the new concrete poetry, for example, of the Noigandres group of poets, and the Brazilian thinkers of the diaspora in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, whom Flusser invoked time and again but without ever actually naming them,¹⁶ are some of the other important influences.

Flusser was a skillful deconstructor of the open archive of European intellectual history. He vigorously mixed texts that are familiar and have come down to us, played etymologically with fragments of words and meanings, and made them collide, unprotected. Already between the World Wars, but even more after the nuclear conflagrations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Flusser appropriated in his own specific way contemporary themes that were doing the rounds, like the state of the soul in the technological age (Günther Anders, Arnold Gehlen), and reconfigured them time and again. “His manner of proceeding is intensive and not extensive,” commented the film critic and filmmaker Harun Farocki accurately in a review of Vilém Flusser’s book *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder* (English edition: *Into the Universe of Technical Images*): “[...] he does not conquer foreign territories, but opens up a marked-out region with many paths. It is also a process of incursion, to split up words and to seek in them a startling and informative meaning.”¹⁷

Flusser was an exceptionally gifted communicator, who like virtually no other in the nomadic intellectual circus of the 1980s could speak in a tone of utter conviction, of “self-assured knowledge”¹⁸ like an Old Testament prophet (rather like Ernst Bloch). This manner harmonized perfectly with his program of a new

eschatology based on informatics. From his early writings as a poet and journalist in São Paulo, his later work for various newspapers in the Federal Republic of Germany, his first books to appear in print quite late in his career in Europe, to his legendary lectures and interviews (“Am I too difficult for television?”), Flusser, the philosopher of communication, developed in the end into an intellectual writer made by the media, a celebrated star of the German-language media and cultural scene. It did not matter what topic was going to be discussed, “the lecture halls are always filled when the white-bearded lecturer is announced; he has great difficulty in remaining seated, and once he has risen to speak it is by no means easy to stop him.”¹⁹

Scribere necesse est, vivere non est – Flusser was fond of quoting (with a slight modification) these words of Henry the Navigator. Flusser compared himself as a writer with the Portuguese prince for whom navigating on the high seas was more important than life itself. And Flusser did not just write, he wrote to publish. To be published, to hold his thoughts physically in the form of a book in his hands or as oscillating electronic artifacts, corresponded to his idea of *becoming human* as becoming a project – which also included his voluminous correspondence.²⁰ Flusser’s letters of request and containing instructions, letters addressed even to close relatives in which he reports at length on what he is thinking about at the moment and his planned publications, letters in which he monologizes on what he has just read to order his thoughts, and particularly the letters in which he offers his texts for publication and for discussion, go far beyond what Christian F. Gellert (1715–1769), an early theorist of modern private correspondence, described as characteristic of this medium: “When I write letters, I act as if I were speaking [...]”²¹ Unlike correspondents such as Alex Bloch who had only contempt for publishing because it served the vanity of the writer rather than the needs of the dialogue partner,²² Flusser explicitly planned to make his own letters, carbon copies of which he kept meticulously in numerous files, available for posterity.

Hannah Arendt’s delightful phrase “thinking without a bannister”²³ is what she practiced; it also shifts instability to the vertical. Flusser’s intellectual *modus operandi* is *freestyle* thinking.²⁴ It recognizes neither disciplines nor subjects, and does not pay homage to any other academic structures and precepts. Above all it seeks to intervene in ongoing cultural processes and influence them. How is it possible to represent something as nervous, mercurial, chaotic, and dynamic as the intellectual microcosmos of the cultural philosopher from Prague? How can the key assumptions of the work of a philosophical writer be rendered accessible for others, who left behind a heterogeneous corpus with a wealth of unpublished fragments?

We have availed ourselves of a suggestion of Michel Foucault’s, who wanted his books on the archaeology of past present-days and their power structures to be understood as open toolboxes. The operational encyclopedia *Flusseriana* should be understood as one such toolbox that is capable of further development. From the multitude of Vilém Flusser’s texts and from existing lists of concepts and keywords we have selected over two hundred concepts which we think are

¹⁹ Hans-Joachim Müller, “Der Philosoph als fröhlicher Wissenschaftler,” in: *DIE ZEIT*, March 15, 1991, online: www.zeit.de/1991/12/der-philosoph-als-froehlicher-wissenschaftler, 04/03/2015; also in: Wagnermaier, “Nachwort,” in: Flusser 2009, p. 268; translated from the German.

²⁰ His correspondence with the Swiss writer Felix Philipp Ingold alone, from whom Flusser received considerable support in the 1980s, comprises 48 letters “[...] from the years 1981–1990 as well as countless manuscripts from Flusser. Additionally, there are around 15 letters from his widow Edith Flusser after his death.” (correspondence with Felix Philipp Ingold, December 18, 2014; translated from the German)

²¹ Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, *Briefe, nebst einer praktischen Abhandlung von dem guten Geschmacke in Briefen*, Johann Wendler, Leipzig, 1751, p. 9; translated from the German.

²² See: Vilém Flusser, *Bodenlos. Eine philosophische Autobiographie*, Bollmann, Bensheim, Düsseldorf, 1992, p. 107.

²³ Hannah Arendt, “On Hannah Arendt,” in: Melvyn A. Hill (ed.), *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1979, pp. 301–339, here p. 336.

²⁴ “Freistil” [Freestyle] was the title of a famous program which Thomas Schmitt developed at the end of the 1980s, shortly before the Internet became established as a mass medium, for the film production company TAG/TRAUM and Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), the West German Broadcasting corporation. “[...] Freistil is permanent overload. The grotesque encounters the intellectual, the banal encounters the pretentious, and speed encounters contemplation... Freistil establishes connections, audacious and paradoxical [...]” Thomas Schmitt, quoted in a review by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, reprinted on the cover of the DVD recording of the second broadcast in 1989, which included the participants Jean Baudrillard, O. W. Fischer, and Peter Weibel, Archive of thomas schmitt film.

²⁵ Peter Naumann, in an interview with Klaus Sander and Anja Theismann, 1999, in São Paulo, Vilém Flusser Archive, Supposé, Archive Klaus Sander, Berlin; translated from the German.

suitable for projecting the nodes, lines, and consolidations of Flusser's thought into the public sphere. Over one hundred authors, many of whom suggested other *lemmata* to us, have helped us in our endeavor to avoid any limitation to specialist areas of interest and to include and orient *Flusseriana* on contemporary research on this philosopher, on art, and on media. Many of the authors have written PhD dissertations, MA theses, essays, books, and other texts in which they discuss Flusser's relationship to the arts, philosophy, science and humanities, and technology, in Brazil, France, USA, the Czech Republic, Poland, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Hungary, Switzerland, Austria, and Germany. Within the framework of this project, the current volume is an interim report and presents the current state of the dialogue. The project of this open-end, operational encyclopedia will be continued in the years to come in the nonlocation of the Internet. It will proliferate as research on Flusser's cosmos of thought grows: with this book we want to contribute to this process.

All kinds of different thought-things have found their way into this toolbox. There are particularities like Indian summer, the atlas, gardens, submissiveness, the animal, or the Mediterranean Sea. The *lemmata* selected also flag consolidations of Flusser's thought, which take up constantly recurring themes of Ernst Cassirer's (language, myth, and religion); major philosophical concepts such as memory, history, and ideology; and immense ethical challenges such as altruism, suicide, and responsibility. Flusser's central interest in the philosophy of communications is articulated in the discussion of familiar concepts such as apparatus and abstraction, automaton, cybernetics, and telematics, as well as his neologisms like communicology and the universe of dots. Only a few of the philosophers and writers who profoundly influenced Flusser are included in this preliminary toolbox, who wrote in German or Portuguese. Hannah Arendt, Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Franz Kafka, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Ludwig Wittgenstein are very necessary inclusions as are João Guimarães Rosa, Vicente Ferreira da Silva, and Milton Vargas. (Flusser's web of philosophical influences is one of the focuses of the exhibition at the ZKM | Karlsruhe [2015] and at the Academy of the Arts, Berlin [2015/2016].)

And almost always Flusser's thought turns to the arts with their endless interrelationships of thinking and doing, of technology, science, and poiesis: architecture, cities and dwelling, image critique, photography, and technical imagination, masks and color codes; music is only marginally involved, and in the foreground stand the old and new powers of the imagination... Flusser felt comfortable in the realm of the imaginary. He defined this region very broadly to span the visual arts and design; Mira Schendel, who worked exactly in this field, is one of his protagonists. Flusser accepted the arts as his home in the same radical way that he accepted his writing – in opposition to everything that evoked associations with territoriality or property.

During his flight through the diaspora in the second half of the twentieth century, Vilém Flusser could not afford the luxury of a native language in thought, writing, or speaking. Even during his childhood in Prague Flusser was used to alternating between the Czech language and the rather antiquated and stilted High German spoken there, which his sonorous voice carried so distinctively into the intellectual arenas of the 1980s, from Hamburg to Vienna. One of Brazil's superb translators, Peter Naumann, commented that Flusser spoke Portuguese through this German powered by his thought. As someone who had got to know Flusser "through a headset, as a translator," he tentatively advanced the "hypothesis, that Flusser is one of those people who lives between the languages."²⁵ The Esperanto of *mondial* communication, English, Flusser learned to write and speak already after fleeing to London, as a businessman in Brazil, and later on his trips to the USA; he reactivated his French in the 1970s and extended his command of the language through the many lectures and seminars he gave in France, as

well as through debating with intellectuals and artist friends – and particularly after settling down at Robion in Provence. For Flusser language did not primarily serve cultural identity; it was above all else a code. It served his passionate and desperate attempts to get his thoughts published and the dialogue with others. To exist outside language was inconceivable to Flusser.

That we decided to publish the entries in the operational dictionary of *Flusseriana* in the three languages that Flusser expressed himself in most frequently will at least give readers some idea of his leaps and shifts between the various concretizations of this code. In terms of editing, the decision caused nightmares. We are profoundly grateful to the many translators and copyeditors, and the editorial staff of the ZKM | Karlsruhe, especially Katharina Holas who was in charge of the project management at ZKM, and of the Vilém Flusser Archive in Berlin for mastering so impressively the challenges presented by this work. For communicating with Flusser researchers in Brazil we found in Moná de Paula Antunes a wonderful colleague, who at the end navigated with aplomb between Portuguese, German, and English for us; her efforts have left a strong imprint on *Flusseriana*. In the preliminary phase Norval Baitello, Jr., supervised many of the authors from Brazil, for which we are very grateful. We are especially indebted to Erick Felinto, a Flusser expert from Rio de Janeiro, for translating the German texts into Portuguese, and to Gloria Custance and Marília Sette for their copy-editing expertise. In the telematic networks this dialogue among the languages will also continue.

The diversity of themes that the toolbox contains finds its complement in the diversity of approaches used in the *lemmata*. Many reflect on concepts, others are contemplative, a number pursue a hermeneutical exposition of Flusser's ideas, and still others locate his themes in a wider context of thinking about the state and the development of culture in Flusser's post-history. Any inconsistencies we have left deliberately. They are supported by a carefully selected bibliography, which contains all the texts that have been used or quoted, texts by Flusser and by other authors (in different languages). The biography of Flusser, which heads up *Flusseriana*'s appendix of material resources, was researched in Prague, along the trajectory of his flight, his exile in England and Brazil, and the many stations along the route of his return to Europe. It is conceived as a working biography, as a curriculum of his life that took place substantially on philosophical terraces, with friends, in bookshops, lecture halls, seminar rooms, in front of microphones and other recording devices, as well as at a typewriter.

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