

The Communication and Media Theory of Vilém Flusser, Pioneer of Media Studies in Brazil and Germany

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BIOGRAPHICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

Vilém Flusser was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in 1920. In this multicultural city he was initially influenced by three cultures, Jewish, Czech and German and, parallel to that, by a humanistic education in philosophy, including Greek and Latin. In 1939, still as a student at Karlov University, Flusser escaped from Nazi occupation; he was the only family member who survived the holocaust. From London, where he passed briefly by the *London School of Economics*, he migrated to Brazil, where he lived in São Paulo. There he acquired one more cultural coat during the 31 years of his stay before returning to Europe in 1972.

After having worked in his father-in-law's commercial and industrial business in his first years in Brazil, dedicating to his "work during the day and to philosophy at night", only in the 1950's would he start an academic career. In 1959 he started to lecture "Philosophy and Evolution of Science" at *Universidade de São Paulo* (USP). He participated in the intellectual public life, publishing in well known newspapers; in Brazil, in *Estado de São Paulo* and *Folha de São Paulo* (from 1961), and, in Germany, in *Merkur* and in the important *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* - from 1966; many articles from the book *Fenomenologia do Brasileiro* (1998) [*Phenomenology of the Brazilian*] were originally published in this paper. Due to his intellectual performance, Flusser was invited to participate in the circle of *Instituto Brasileiro de Filosofia* (IBF) [*Brazilian Institute of Philosophy*], in 1962.

Flusser's philosophical interest aimed initially at the *Philosophy of Language*, and at the authors Moritz Schlick, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Rudolf Carnap, that is, in the studies of Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle. He also read Anglo-Saxon and German philosophy, such as Ernst Cassirer, and authors from American Pragmatism,

such as John Dewey, Bertrand Russel and Alfred Whitehead. However, Wittgenstein and Edmund Husserl were the ones who would mostly influence Flusser. His own *Philosophy of Language*, which he also gave as a course from 1965 on at *Instituto Tecnológico de Aeronáutica* [Airforce Technological Institute], in São José dos Campos, was published between 1960 and 1980, in the periodicals of IBF, and his first book, *Língua e realidade* [Language and Reality], published in 1963 (and reedited in 2004), is also related to it.

In the same year, 1963, he also started to lecture “Theory of Communication” at *Faculdade de Comunicação e Humanidades da Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado* (FAAP) [Faculty of Communication and Humanities of the Armando Álvares Penteado Foundation], and in *Escola de Comunicação e Artes* (ECA) [School of Communication and Arts], at USP. It was at FAAP that Flusser structured in 1967 one of the first courses of Communication in Brazil, which renders him the merit of being one of the pioneers of media and communication sciences in the country.

After returning to Europe in 1972, he also acquired some academic status there, especially for having been one of the first to perceive in the 80’s the consequences of the revolution caused by the new technology of media and information. Flusser became, as Andreas Ströhl observed, “the only philosopher who pursued, early and without any reservations, the challenge of a future forged by the media” (2000: 58-59). And the same Flusserian disciple, who also organized the “*Writings*” of Flusser’s, published in 2002, in the United States, testifies to an increasing influence in Europe and in Latin America: “ten years after his death, Vilém Flusser’s reputation as one of Europe’s most original modern philosophers continues to grow.” (2002: I)

In these European times, Flusser became very productive, spending part of the year in travels to Brazil, France, Switzerland, Germany and the United States, participating in events and conferences - as, for instance, in 1974, together with Hans Magnus Enzensberger, at the *Museum of Modern Art* in New York, at a conference about “The Future of Television”, where he presented a “Phenomenology of Television” (Flusser 1977); or at *Ars Eletronica* in Linz (Austria) in 1988, together, among others, with Jean Baudrillard, Friedrich Kittler and Heinz von Foerster, at a conference about

“philosophies of the new technology” (Ars Eletronica 1989). Flusser wrote and published his books in four languages at which he was fluent in both speaking and writing: German, French, English and Portuguese. Only few texts that were written in one of these languages were rendered into others, what makes difficult the access to his production. However, translations, which form the base for any reception, are being produced gradually.

THE BRAZILIAN FLUSSER AND THE EUROPEAN FLUSSER

Flusser’s biography itself suggests two different stages in his intellectual trajectory: a first one in Brazil and the other after his return to Europe in 1972. Despite the fact that the germ of Flusser’s second stage of production, between 1973 and 1991, was already in the works of his Brazilian first phase, in which he “forged most of his theories” (Machado 2002: 27), the change of countries reflected in a change of content and orientation in his works. In his European works of the 80’s there is an emphasis on media and communication theories and, the respective ideas, formerly developed in Brazil, only in this European phase would take the shape of a publication of important books such as *Kommunikologie* [Communicology] (1998a), *Gesten* [Gestures] (1994b), *Medienkultur* [Media Culture] (1997), *Die Schrift* [Writing] (1992), *Lob der Oberflächlichkeit. Für eine Phänomenologie der Medien* [Eulogy of superficiality. Towards a Media Phenomenology] (1995), and *Die Informationsgesellschaft. Phantom oder Realität?* [The information society: phantom or reality?] (1996).

Since the majority of the publications in this period were written in German, the attention given to Flusser in Germany is greater (Cologne University, for instance, houses the Flusser Archive, containing his works, letters etc.); however, also in Brazil his works had remarkable influence and to this day there are researchers who consider themselves “flusserian” or those who base their works in Flusser (Baitello Junior, Celso Lafer, Arlindo Machado, Lúcia Santaella, among others; see also Bernardo/Mendes 2000, Lages 2004).

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

COMMUNICOLOGY: THEORY OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA

If it is possible, among the various sciences, to define a sociology, a psychology, a biology and a technology, why is not there a “communicology”, theory and science of communication? Should communication, as a scientific object, especially in times of mediatic revolution, be considered less important than other areas? Wouldn't it deserve a science of its own? This is the rationale for Flusser's communicology.

Through the term “communicology” Flusser defined “Theory of Communication” as a “metadiscourse of all human communications, in a way that it can be used to highlight the structures of these communications” (Flusser 1999a: 223). In a manuscript from 1973, Flusser described the structure of the project he intended to use in the communication course installed at FAAP in 1967, which, according to his account, had been discussed before, in Boston, with Noam Chomsky, George Santillana and William van Ornam Quine, and assembled in cooperation with Miguel Reale (professor and philosopher of jurisprudence, former rector at USP).

The field of communication, being disordered and diffuse, needs to be limited, requiring an operation in three levels. In the first, the ontological one, human communication is defined in order to circumscribe the competence of the theory. To deepen in this defined area requires, in the second level, the “epistemological” one, the search for methods to analyze and understand communication according to the definition established in the first level. Last, it is necessary to apply the results achieved in real communication, that is, to verify the theory through practice. In this third level, the “noëttically engaged” one, the question is for how it should be, and the search is for methods to improve and change the existent human communication. This program is “open”, in the sense that it does not establish *a priori* what the competence of the theory is, which the methods are and how the results can be transferred to practice. Communicology intermingles itself with other scientific fields and disciplines, from which methods and competence can be used; the one who realizes such activities is the “communicologist” (this term seems to have been coined by Flusser), and through “communicology” the communicologist displays the instruments to interfere in the process of communication.

Based on this, from the focus on specific aspects, the following methods are being proposed:

- a) in relation to our corporal and nervous senses (sight, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling, etc.): methods from physiology and behaviorism;
- b) in relation to the social functions (mass communication, elite communication and “closed circuit” communication): methods from psychology and social psychology;
- c) in relation to the dynamic structure of communication (discourses, dialogues, networks, systems): game theory methods (“Spieltheorie”) and cybernetics;
- d) in relation to the structure of the symbols (denotative, connotative, imaginative and conceptual communications, etc.): critical theories from art and literature;
- e) in relation to the informative feature: theory of information methods;
- f) in relation to the structure of the content (imperative, indicative, exclamative, etc.): logical analysis;
- g) in relation to the structure of the channels (one, two or more channels, “multimedia”): methods from *Gestalt* psychology;
- h) in relation to the economic structure (professional communication – which is work -, consumption, entertainment, etc.): methods from economics, sociology, etc.

Thus, the area treated by communication theory consists of face-to-face communication, that is, verbal communication (e, f), or non-verbal (a), of mass communication, of groups and through media (b); to this area, a discourse analysis could be applied, be it philosophical (b) or linguistic (f); and communicology crosses disciplines such as semiotics, aesthetics and logic (d, f), sociology and applied social sciences (h), cybernetics (c, e), psychology (g), neuroscience (a), and more, and anthropology and philosophy.

Although it uses exact sciences (for instance: information theory), communication theory, being essentially interdisciplinary, a “*studium generale*” (Flusser 1998a: 173, 2002: 12), due to the nature of its object, not being “value-free”

(“wertfrei”), is an interpretative discipline, and as such part of the human sciences; since communication is a human product, and thus a cultural one, communication theory

... is, owing to its problematic, and should be also through its methods, a “humanistic” discipline. Therefore, it cannot be, and should not be, a “pure” discipline. It requires a commitment alien to the commitment to natural science [...] there should be, in the theory of communication, no neat distinction between theory and praxis. (2002: 20)

This program from communicology, which Flusser tried to develop in all of his courses is obviously to this day still up-to-date. It would be possible, probably, to recognize this program in the recent researches in Brazil, as presented in the main organizations (such as Compós and Intercom), and also in international ones (such as IAMCR). Difficult, however, is to say until what point Flusser managed to accomplish with this program in his period in Brazil, between 1963 and 1972. Flusser himself summarizes in a resignation tone: “All attempts have been ineffective.” (1999a: 230) Maybe only today, thirty years later, do these perspectives receive the appreciation they deserve – which confirms the idea that part of the role of the “pioneer”, unfortunately is: to be there “before the time”. However, it can have less to do with the researcher than with his object; in the article “On the Theory of Communication”, written in 1986 or 1987, in English, and only recently published, he states:

But because it [the theory of communication] is a new discipline, it is very difficult to say whether, when, and how it will solve its internal problems, and whether it will ever evolve a unified method. (2002: 20)

SEMIOTICS, PHENOMENOLOGY AND CYBERNETICS

The mentioned distance from the academic world as well as his bibliographical circumstances suggest a self-didactic and particular characteristic of Flusser’s work. He himself characterizes his style of doing philosophy as a chess game, considering the philosophers as figures (1999a: 51). Thus, communicology presents a particular theoretical blend, and its nucleus is formed by semiotics enriched with elements from phenomenology and cybernetics.

The theory of communication and the theory of symbols are two sides of the same process, since coding is considered the central problem in communication (Flusser 1999a: 226), as he explains in an “excursus on the concept of codes”:

A code is a system of symbols. Its purpose is to make communication between people possible. Because symbols are phenomenon that replace (“stand for”) other symbols, communication is a substitute: it replaces the experience of “that which it intends”. People must make themselves understandable through codes [...] Man is an “alienated” animal, who must create symbols and order them in codes if he wants to bridge the gap between himself and the “world”. He must attempt to “mediate”. He must attempt to give the world “meaning”. (2002: 36-37)

The human being is seen as a solitary animal who tries to overcome his solitude through communication, through dialogical recognition of the other. The latter is the existential motive of all communication, an idea which is also stimulated by the readings of Martin Buber¹. This is a stand that recognizes the importance of face-to-face communication and regards dialogue as the essence of language. As a *zoon politikon*, an Aristotelian formula (Pol. 1, 2, 1253a), this human being is “bearer of logos” and depends essentially on the existence of signs (*semeia*, therefore *semiotics*), which have the aim of making possible communication and construction of communities among people. And language, which is realized in conversation, “*is a synonym of intellect if defined as ‘field where the organization of words take place’*” (Lafer 1999: 7); hence the “*impenetrable interior*” of man “*constantly produces symbols and ordered structures*” (Flusser 1999a: 240). The function of the intellect is to symbolize and to propose new codes; to create symbols is a continuous process of the *animal symbolicum* (expression coined by Ernst Cassirer) of giving a new meaning to things and objects of the world, and each new symbol visualizes the world in a new and different perspective. The meaning of a symbol (or sign or symptom, without reference to Peirce, not quoted by

¹ Flusser and his wife attended in 1936 a conference of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, in Prague, which left a long-lasting impression.

Flusser) can be, in turn, another symbol, and thus hierarchies of symbols are brought to existence (Flusser 1997: 23, 1998a: 9, 1998b: 25, 1999a: 199-200). Symbols are not “natural” products (as the singing of the birds); even if we find natural forms of communication (like sexuality, mother-baby interaction), this is not characteristic for human communication, which is based on the production of symbols and for this reason an “artificial” process. Symbols are entities whose conventional character is established in a conscious or unconscious fashion, and which represent other things, “concrete things”, actually. The representation of the world, reached by the operations of abstraction and imagination, is fundamental, not only for the perception of images, but for any “*mediations between man and the world*” (Flusser 1998b: 29). For those who participate in the convention, who accept it as a “code” and know how to decode the symbols, they [the symbols] represent meanings; thus, symbols are essentially intersubjective (Flusser 1998a: 250).

The centrality of the code concept in Flusserian theory is articulated in various book or chapter titles, such as *The Codified World* (Flusser 1974, 2002: 35-41), and the notion of code is used to refer to all languages as, for instance, the separation of photographs in distribution channels is denominated “a *transcoding* operation” (1999b: 70), or: from the newspapers point of view, “photography *recodes* the linear articles into images” (1998b: 71, my italics). Other examples for codes are language, writing, human gestures and also the media – seen as structures (be them material or not, technical or not), in which codes function. This Flusserian notion of media – and *Media Studies* were also considered the nucleus of the FAAP program – is far-reaching, comprehending from paintings in ancient caves to current networks. Also, the telephone, a group of students, the body and a soccer game are considered media because they allow the functioning of codes, each in a specific manner. What matters is not the “nature” of the media (as McLuhan suggested), but the way of using it and the articulation of the code. Communication always depends on media, and perhaps Flusser’s greatest discovery was to perceive that every media possesses an internal logic, that is, a media transmits information about reality according to its own laws. If we change the structure of the media, we also change the perceived reality. It can be

said that, maybe, the idea of a particular logic for every media was already present in embryonic form in the first book, *Lingua e realidade (Language and reality)*, where language is conceived not only as a map of reality (echoing Wittgenstein), but as something that composes a *feedback* between itself and reality.

Flusser conceived his theory of gestures (1994b) as an interpretative discipline “*of the phenomenal manifestations of human freedom*” (1999a: 15). Benefiting from phenomenology, Flusser tries to distinguish human communication from other phenomena, and identifies “gesture” as criterion that makes possible the crucial differentiation between “culture” and “nature”. Human gestures are not simply objects among others, “*because the communicative dimension of gesture is primordial in relation to the other dimensions*” (1994b: 217). He differentiates, along with others, the gestures of writing, speaking, doing, loving, painting, photographing, filming, planting, phoning, and “*the gesture of video*” (1994b: 32-216). A gesture is the expression of an interiorized world, a symbolic corporal movement, whose motive is the production of a meaning (1994b: 8-10). Gestures can be directed i) to objects and things or ii) to other human beings, the latter being intersubjective communication. Thus, the competence of the theory of communication would be equivalent to all the intersubjective articulations of the interiorized human world.

Flusser emphasizes sociability as a cultural aspect of human beings. Human communication is identified as a specific form of “being together” (“Mitsein”, obviously a heideggerian term), or, to paraphrase, a form of sociability. For this sociability, the symbolic codings and conventions, which imply contractual relations among human beings, are fundamental. Since man is an animal who knows how to store acquired information (1998a: 12), transmission of information stored in the memory of one generation to the memory of the next is seen as the main function of communication.

Through communication humans weave a network of the coded world around themselves, and constitute forms of arts and sciences, philosophy and religion (2002: 10) – that is, “symbolic forms”, an expression taken from the main work of Ernst Cassirer (*Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 1923-1929), author whom Flusser repeatedly

highlights as reference (1999a: 235). Hence, the theory of communication would be competent for all codings as forms of sociability, that is, to the world of symbols and the human spirit.

The thought of defining human beings through communication, based on symbols and codes, which are also equated with “culture” (Flusser 1998a: 74), corresponds perfectly to the definition of semiotics from Umberto Eco, for whom culture “*should be studied as a phenomenon of communication based in signification systems*” (Eco 1997: 16). It can be treated by various different sciences, but from the specific point of view of communication, culture is analyzed as a transmission of messages. Since communication theory analyses human phenomena through the symbolic aspect, it searches for the motives of codings, and not the causes (social, political, economic, psychological, historical etc.), that is, motives are interpreted as intersubjective phenomena (Flusser 1997: 9-10, 1997: 261, 1998a: 246). Flusser makes it very clear that the science of communication has to distinguish itself from other social sciences and focus on the communicative aspect of the phenomena, so as not to run the risk of “psychologizing” or “sociologizing”, which would reflect in a loss of the humanist feature of communication (1998a: 256).

Husserl’s phenomenology – which also contains a semiotic theory (Husserl 1928) - was perhaps Flusser’s first and deepest intellectual influence, through which, again, he was conducted, in the fifties, to Heidegger, another fundamental phenomenologist for his thought (Vargas 1999: 279). The flusserian notion, through which reality is “*everything against which we run into on the way to death, so, that which interests us*”, has a clear influence of Heidegger’s philosophy. Several titles (here translated to English) avow his “*inclination towards phenomenological analysis*” (Lafer 1999: 15), such as the article “Two Approaches to the Phenomenon: Television” (1977), and the books: *Things and Not-Things: phenomenological drafts* (1993), *Eulogy of superficiality. Towards a Media Phenomenology* (1995), *Phenomenology of the Brazilian* (1998), and *Gestures: a phenomenological approach* (1994b).

The influence of cybernetics, finally, is reflected in the usage of basic notions such as “information”, “entropy” and “redundancy”, “channel”, “medium”, “to code”

and “to decode”, “Input” and “Output” (Flusser 1998a: 19, 1998b: 23-25, 34, 72). “Communicology” is defined as treating the forms and codes of communication, be it the creation of new information, or processing, storing and distribution of existent information. “Sender” and “receiver” are constituent notions of the flusserian model of communication also used habitually, being the four fundamental structures of the discourse differentiated according to the way information is distributed among *sender* and *receiver*, *channels* and *codes* (1998b: 66, 1998a: 16-50). To decipher gestures, that is, discover their meanings, is a permanent activity in our daily lives (1994b: 10), whose communication feature is treated with the dichotomy “*sender – receiver*”: the meaning of the sender and the decoded content next to the receptor are parts of two different codes; we “can only talk about *true* communication” if the two are decoded simultaneously and “the gesture of the speaker is understood by his counterpart” (1994b: 225). Also in Flusser’s philosophy of photography, “information”, as well as “receptors” and “program”, is considered a “key concept” (1998b: 91). But Flusser gets himself away from the simplistic model type *sender – receptor* generally disseminated (1998a: 270), and uses these cybernetic notions in a particular sense, framed by the approach itself.

MODERNITY AND MEDIATIC REVOLUTION

According to Flusser's own account, his starting points for the theory of communication were the interest for *Philosophy of Language* and *Philosophy of Science*. Science and language, despite having their own characteristics, are two manners of the same human project, both based in the "human capacity to symbolize": to access reality. Modern science is seen as a specific discourse, constituted by symbols, specifically denotative elements ordered by structures that follow the rules of logic and mathematics. As well as language, science transforms and lacerates reality following its own rules; similarly to art, philosophy and religion, science covers us humans with a communicative network of symbols, which binds us and which we simultaneously build. This dialectics of representation, which at the same time exposes and conceals reality, constitutes the truth of scientific propositions, which are based on a specific coding. What is valid for all codes is also valid for the scientific code: the propositions are intersubjectively true to all who accept the coding, and senseless to all the others (1999a: 239). The fundament of this discourse is formed by a convention that is somehow conscious, a specific sociability: "in this sense, science is a form of communication of the bourgeois west".

This modern science has entered into crisis. According to Flusser, the aim of modern science is "objective" knowledge, based on "pure reason"; however, the "epistemological problem" is that scientists 'discover' "in the bottom of appearances only the structures of their own reason, which they had projected there" (1998c: 175). Once left aside the aim at objectivity, which "is not reachable by man" because the models of scientific theory are not value-free, and values in crisis, to Flusser "all the disciplines [beyond science: art, politics, philosophy, religion] will become equivalent sources of knowledge" (1998c: 171-173). Thus, he loses confidence in a project of neopositivist rationality which he had followed initially, and expresses his hope, that art can "free science from its epistemological crisis and open it to the esthetical moment" (1998c: 174), and free society from the danger of technocracy. In this thought we encounter the relativization of scientific rationale, typical for post-modernity.

This crisis of science and rationality in Flusser's case is not a purely academic question, but also of biographic relevance, for he had suffered the consequences of

Nazism and the holocaust. As a reminder, “Auschwitz” meant to Adorno the end of Western rationality and enlightenment. A common solution at that time was the search for a leftist (political) alternative, which was unfit for Flusser due to the disappointment with Stalinism (Flusser 1999a: 32). This took Flusser away from Marxism forever², which caused some animosity among his leftist friends (especially Milton Vargas) during the military dictatorship in Brazil.

This past constituted his condition as a migrant. The title of the autobiographical book “Brasil ou em busca do novo homem” [“Brazil or in search of the new man”] (1994) expresses a hope in relation to a better new world, an alternative to Western decadence, which Flusser had when he arrived in Brazil, and also an expectation in relation to Brazil as a country, in which tolerance and racial integration had succeeded, shared by many European emigrants of that time (cf. for instance Brill 2003). The reasons to leave Brazil – deliberately - in 1972 were several. However, among them, according to Flusser, the military dictatorship: with the military coup in 1964 [which “frustrated” Flusser and caused his “distress in relation to my Brazilian nation” (1999a: 256)] he renounced his dream that Brazilian culture would be an alternative.

For the diagnosis of the crisis in modern science Flusser goes from Edmund Husserl to Karl Popper. In the seminal work of Husserl’s, “The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology”, from 1936, Husserl searches for an explanation for the political crisis of the thirties, which he thought was based on a form of human life marked by the absence of reasonable judgement (“vernünftige Einsicht”, Prechtl 1991: 107), and locates in the bottom of this crisis another one, that of philosophy. Objectivism and positivism of the exact sciences, which only regard facts objectively recognizable, and eliminate the subject, and thus produce a technical, scientific and exact knowledge which is separated from subjective sense making, would cause that crisis. Underlying this trajectory, Husserl identifies the “mathematization” of nature, which makes it possible to calculate any form of intervention in nature, separated from the life world.

² According to Ströhl: “The Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939 led to Flusser’s complete break with Marxism.” (2002: 19)

Flusser transfers and applies this idea of the mathematization of nature in Husserl's sense to the digital era, and states that the crisis of values is related to the structural change in our media, and that our post-historical era is characterized by the "end of history" in its linear form. Borrowing support also from Popper's observation, for whom "the term *truth* is experiencing a moment of crisis in the scientific realm" (2002: 47), Flusser refers to the kuhnian notion of "paradigm" (1992: 147) to designate the structural change in media that results from there. In the last conference given, two days before his death in a car accident near his hometown Prague, entitled "Change of Paradigms" (2002: 85-90), he defends that "instead of 'true' and 'false' we have to put 'probable' and 'improbable'" (90). The change in this paradigm of communication has the following consequence:

Western epistemology is based on the Cartesian premise that to think means to follow the written line [...] The whole problem of truth and falsehood, of fiction and reality, must now be reformulated in the light of the mass media ... (2002: 26)

“Linearity” is essentially connected to writing. After the introduction of the written language and having it as a means, started the phase of linear history which lasted only about 4,000 years. As he writes in 1985, we are now in the lane of pure information society [“reine Informationsgesellschaft” (1985: 8)], entering digital culture and telematic society, thus entering the “Universe of technical images”.³ This mediatic revolution, accompanied by cultural implications, makes even more important the dialogue in the form of interpersonal communication, such as in the philosophy of the “Recognition of the Other” in the sense of Martin Buber’s mentioned above. In this mediatic revolution, contemporary technical images are fundamentally different from the traditions of the imagetic world of pre-history: constituted by pixels, the props are not even touchable, nor graspable, nor understandable, nor accessible to the senses. These technical images, being unfoldings of linear texts, for they are processed by devices, are “computations of notions”, which, as such, “can be calculated [...] and computed”. They can process and manipulate information (1985: 14).

Antagonizing with Karl Marx, he considers not property and economy anymore, but information and communication as that what attributes power and constitutes the infrastructure of society (Flusser 1997: 155). He identifies two industrial revolutions: the first, which changed labor and the second, initiated by photography and telegraphy, which changed communication. To perceive Flusser as a “philosopher of photography”, a view based in the famous book with this title, is to disregard the fact that photography is merely the first step into this development, in which “the meaning of the world in general and of life in the world transforms itself under the pressure of this revolution in communications.” (2002: 35). This revolution also affects the social relations. According to him, the revolution of codes caused by TV, computer and video would be as profound as the revolution caused by the steam machine (1998a: 236). In that time Flusser considered that we are in the middle of this process of changes and ruptures, and because of this we need a science of media and communication. Likewise, as

³ Flusser started to reflect about technical images parting from photography, in the book *Ensaio sobre a filosofia da fotografia. Para uma filosofia da técnica* [Essay on the philosophy of photography. Towards a philosophy of technique] from 1983, and after that he broadened these reflections in a book in 1985, *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*, translating: “Entering the universe of technical images”.

technology regards the first revolution, “communicology” should analyze and understand this new second cultural revolution, the one of the technical images and of *mass media* (1998a: 235-36, 265).

Contemporarily, we have entered the “age of media culture” (Flusser 2002: 58), and the title of the book *Media Culture (Medienkultur)* describes the current state of society and the communicational revolution, as well as the society of telematic information and the transformations in time and space. Inserted here are the theories of image, which deal with the relation *world- image- text- technical image* and develop a phenomenology of photography, films, video, television and cinema. The proliferation of images and the contemporary tendency in modern society of always presenting more information in audiovisual images instead of texts, a process which has been designated as *iconic turn*, coined by T. J. W. Mitchell, in 1994, was anticipated by Flusser, for in his works he reflected about the increasing preponderance of technical images as communication means. In this epoch, called by him “post-historical”, concept which is characterized by a change in the paradigms and the codes through which we communicate, the systems of writing are replaced by technical images, in a “*circular process which retranslates texts into images*” (Santaella 2000: 125), producing a menace to society, in a way that Flusser’s criticism of communication and images presents itself as a criticism of society and culture. Thus Flusser diagnoses the collapse of texts and the hegemony of images in post-historical societies: in the “*revolution of technical images, they become ‘fake’, ‘ugly’ and ‘bad’; besides not having been capable of reunifying culture, they forge society into an amorfic mass*” (Flusser 1998b: 38).

This analysis of contemporary society, which should not be confused with concepts from post-modernity (cf. Ströhl 2000: 49-54; Flusser defended the difference of his own view in several texts), has various implications. The end of the historical era and linearity also affected logic and rationality, be it social or scientific, and for the future of telematic society, according to Flusser, there are two possibilities. Towards ill:

This could lead to a generalized de-politicization, deactivation, and alienation of humankind, to the victory of the consumer society, and to the totalitarianism of

the mass media. Such a development would look very much like the present mass culture, but in more exaggerated or gross form.

Towards good:

... imaginal thinking will succeed in incorporating conceptual thinking. This would lead to new types of communication in which man consciously assumes the structural position.

Between the two options Flusser does not want to choose; the future is open. According to him:

It depends very much on each one of us which sort of posthistorical future there will be. (2002: 34, written in 1973)

To conclude, Flusser perceived the fundamental importance of communication for man and society, either in the form of interpersonal dialogue or in mediatic form. While gathering support from phenomenology, he made use of one of the most flourishing philosophical paradigms of the twentieth century, to which, according to the specific character of communication, information exchange, he adds elements from cybernetics, and, as any communication depends on the mediation of a sign, the theory of communication, or communicology, operates with terms from semiotics. Being an institutional pioneer of the field of communication, Flusser drew together all these theoretical trends which are relevant to the field of communication. Beyond that, he anticipated the contemporary view of society as being characterized by information, communication and media, which also includes the structural changes resulting from this process.

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