

International symposium, connected to the exhibition „Without Firm Ground – Vilém Flusser and the Arts” at GAMU in Prague

Playing against the apparatus. Vilém Flusser’s media and culture philosophy

Filozofická fakulta UK and Goethe-Institut, Prague, 7.-8.4. 2017

Organized by the Research group *Media Theory/Philosophy*, Charles University Prague. Partners: Goethe-Institut, The Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) in Prague, GAMU, Kompetenzzentrum Medienanthropologie, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

Convened and Moderated by Baruch Gottlieb & Kateřina Krtilová

Vilém Flusser’s home town Prague is also a philosophical *topos* of his autobiography *Bodenlos*. This word, which has no direct translation in English, literally indicates that the floor or ground has fallen away, that one is without ground, Flusser recounts “refers not only the loss of all models of experience, knowledge and judgement, I realized, but also the loss of the structure connecting these models. Thus we have lost not only all models assigned to ‘Prague’ a considered them from now on as empty forms, but I had also lost the construction (namely the western tradition) supporting the models and subsequently understood they just provided rules for a meaningless game.”

Bodenlosigkeit (being without ground) can be interpreted as a principle connecting Flusser’s philosophy of culture and his understanding of media. The starting point is in both cases a deep crisis of western thought, the ‚models’ that determine our worldview. First, there is Flusser’s existential *Bodenlosigkeit*, which relativized the ‚models’ of the Enlightenment Humanist tradition he was brought up in and characterised his life in exile after 1939, provoking Flusser to develop his philosophical trope “the freedom of the migrant“. Second, Flusser elaborates a media philosophy, looking into practices and techniques, models, structures and games, things and „non-things“ (*Undinge*), architectures and tools which shape culture and reality, knowledge and perception. Images, writing, calculation and computation constitute modes of consciousness and reality which can here be described only in relation to other „universes“. The freedom of the migrant seems to originate with the possibility of “jumping” from one universe to another in a radical questioning of all modes and models – in Flusser’s terms, with the ground falling away.

At the end of Flusser’s history of western culture, following the universe of linear writing, we arrive at the universe of computation. Computation is a technology which not only shapes thinking, but rather replaces it, allowing to mechanize (logical-mathematical) thinking. Computation produces “artificial intelligence” which can operate independent of human perception and temporality. Finally, computer technology turns its operators into its “functionaries”, acting within its rules, choosing from a given set of possibilities.

We wish to explore to what extent Flusser’s concept of “playing against the apparatus” is still possible within the universe of computation. Accepting – with Flusser or Friedrich Kittler – technology as a vital part of culture, the question remains how to critically understand computation

and the different techniques and practices, tools and artworks which culture consists of. When does the understanding of one's own condition merely follow technical, economic or political rules, in Flusser's words "the program of the apparatus" and when or how does it allow for freedom in handling the apparatus? How can we interpret the concept of "the apparatus" in the context of digital technologies? And how can we understand culture not merely in terms of technological determinism but in a critical account of the technical conditions of knowledge, perception and thinking?

Program:

7.4.

FF UK, nám Jana Palacha 2

16:00 – 18:30

Introduction by Kateřina Krtilová and Baruch Gottlieb

Presentations and discussion with Tomáš Dvořák and Daniel Irrgang

18:30 – 19:00 coffee break

19:00 – 20:30

Flusser and the apparatus

Flusser Talk with Steffi Winkler

and a presentation of Jan Kulka's

Pramítačka ("pre-jector")

8.4. Goethe-Institut, Masarykovo náměstí. 32

10:00 – 12:30

Presentations and discussion with Anke Finger, Christoph Ernst and Klára Židková

12:30 – 13:30 lunch break

13:30 – 16:00

Presentations and discussion with Mike Anusas and Michal Šimůnek

The language of the symposium is English, simultaneous interpreting will not be provided.

Free admission.

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