

Rainer Guldin

Fluss/er.

Circle – Spiral – Cloud

“The concept of progress [...] has never been the only available method to grasp reality. In addition to it there have always existed at least two other methods: the concepts of the circle and the pebble. In other words, reality can be understood as a process, a wave (‘progress’), as a recurrence, a constant return (‘circle’) and as a heap of scattered pebbles, as a computation of particles (‘calculation’).”

Vilém Flusser *Jude Sein*¹

“Pois a nossa tradição nos fornece dois [...] modelos da estrutura fundante da realidade. O modelo ‘onda’ para o qual a realidade é processo, e o modelo ‘areia’ para o qual é atômica. O primeiro modelo pode ser chamado ‘heraclítico’, o segundo ‘democritiano.’

Vilém Flusser, *Pós-História*

The text I am presenting here is basically a synthesis of some of the main aspects of the research I have been doing on Vilém Flusser in the last few years. There will, therefore, be some repetitions, but I do hope also a few new insights, especially with regard to a more panoramic vision of the critical potential of Vilém Flusser’s thinking.

I would like to start with an apparently insignificant biographical detail from Vilém Flusser’s life using it as a significant knot from which to unravel some of the main threads of his thinking. In his texts of the 1960ies Flusser repeatedly reiterated the significance of proper names. Most words have already their roots in the humus of language. Proper names, however, have to be named first, before they can be transformed through conversation into secondary ones. To describe this process Flusser uses the Portuguese words *chamar* and *conversar*. The act of evoking proper names has to deal with their resistance to being called up from nothingness in order to augment the field of language. The field of the intellect – language – is expanded through productive, poetic intuition, through naming. Flusser describes this creative process in *A Dívida*: “A qualidade vivencial que acompanha a atividade productiva do chamar é conhecida por ‘intuição’. O intelecto, ao chamar algo, intui esse algo. [...] Ao intuir algo, transformo este algo em nome próprio, portanto realizo este algo dentro do intelecto. [...] Podemos, entretanto, definir melhor a intuição que resulta na produção de nomes próprios, já que se trata de uma intuição produtiva. Podemos chamá-la de ‘intuição poetica’. Os nomes próprios são tirados [...] do caos do vir-a-ser

¹ Flusser 1995: 146 [translation RG].

[...] para serem postos para dentro do intelecto.” (Flusser 1999: 64-5) To distinguish primary, that is, proper names, from secondary words Flusser also makes use of the terms *versos* and *conversos*, suggesting through this specific choice that proper names are fundamentally intuitive, poetic creations and that secondary words are created through conversation, that is, by converting verses. “O verso é a maneira como o intelecto se precipita sobre o caos inarticulado que o circunda, é o esforço do intelecto de quebrar o cerco do caos que o limita. [...] No verso a língua se esforça por articular o inarticulável, por tornar pensável o impensável, por realizar o nada.” (ibidem: 66) Proper names are, thus, created by extraction from the nothingness that surrounds language.

In *Jude sein* – Being Jewish – published posthumously in 1995, in a letter to Dr. Joseph Fränkl written on the 16th May 1976 – in which Flusser describes the history of his family – one comes across a short comment on the family name: “[...] ‘Flusser’ apparently means the person who extracts pebbles from rivers for glass-fabrication.” (Flusser 1995: 12) [translation RG] In the context of Flusser’s early theory of creativity this sentence acquires an unexpected if not astonishing significance. The proper name ‘Flusser’ stands metaphorically for the very process of creation leading to the existence of primary names. It, thus, not only contains the German word *Fluss*, river – the idea of unstructured liquidity –, but also the notion of a specific profession, a person who fishes pebbles out of a fluid medium: a poet extracting verses from chaos in order to articulate the unspeakable. Add to this a third, essential element: the idea of a final creative synthesis that is suggested in the making of glass out of sand and gravel. In this process single pebbles or grains of sand are heated up in order to be fused into a new dense uniform material. Glass is generally produced in the course of three distinct phases: in the first stage the single components are liquefied and mixed, in the second superfluous gases are eliminated and finally the glass is cooled down: the alchemy of creation.

Flusser’s name has been used on several occasions to refer to his way of thinking. The title of this symposium *Flusser em Fluxo* points to his ability to overcome simple clear-cut borders in favor of a more fluid, interlingual, intercultural and interdisciplinary way of approaching reality. In Flusser’s nomadic thinking and writing languages and different forms of discourse meet and merge. His philosophical fictions freely combine biology and history, phenomenology and literature to produce a hybrid form of writing and thinking. The same holds true for his essays which occupy a no-man’s land in-between many borders. In the summer of 1991 Michael Bielicky visited Flusser in Robion to produce a multifaceted video including philosophical interviews, conversations on politics, walks in the surrounding Provencal landscape, as well as a game of chess calling it *Flussers Fluss* - Flusser’s flow. In Flussers texts, moreover, metaphors of liquidity and fluidity abound, both in a liberating and threatening sense, as for instance in his view of a dangerous high tide of images in contemporary mass culture.

The passage quoted above, however, opens up at least two other relevant points of view, combining three distinct moments into a continuous narrative of philosophical creation, moving from fluidity to solidity to a final synthesis. One wonders at this point if Flusser was aware of all these implications when writing his letter to Dr. Joseph Fränkl in 1976. From what I know about Flusser's tendency to create personal myths and his profound sense of humor my guess is that he knew, at least intuitively.

In my speech I would like to interpret Flusser's intellectual career from the point of view of this tight triadic metaphoric knot – aptly and surprisingly expressed in his proper name – focusing on three interrelated forms of reflection² and the different aspects of freedom they imply: the circle, the spiral and the cloud. Even if I have to present these three forms one after the other they would have to be seen as revolving around each other, constantly creating new combinations. The metaphor of the circle and the spiral were developed much earlier than that of the cloud. This specific cloud, seen as a swarm of free floating points of view created by calculatory combination, can be found in a series of texts written from the mid 1980ies onward. Flusser, however, occasionally makes use of the metaphor of the cloud also in earlier texts. In *Língua e realidade* poetic clouds fecundate with their rain the prosaic lowlands and in *The Gesture of Writing* written in the early 1970ies Flusser describes an idea that has not been expressed yet in any specific language as a vague proto-thought: “There are some thoughts which begin to take a very nebulous shape within me. [...] as to the nebulous shape of the thoughts, (which do not merit to be called ‘thoughts’ due to that nebulosity) I can say this: the shape is a tendency toward one of the languages at my disposal.” (Flusser 2012:10) Both passages associate the cloud with creative processes. The notion of a nebulous proto-thought, furthermore, anticipates the latter view of clouds as shifting borderless fields of possibility from which computers extract new astonishing shapes. In the same way, the circle and the spiral have gone through a theoretical evolution of their own consisting in a continuous reinterpretation in view of the new areas of thought Flusser incorporated in his thinking in the course of his writing career.

From the point of view of cannibalism one could say that the three metaphors contain each other, the same way texts contain images and the target language the source language: the spiral contains the circle and the cloud contains both the circle and the spiral. But there is still another way of looking at the three interrelated metaphors. In fact, the idea of circularity has been associated by Flusser, especially in the writings of the 1980ies, with post-modernity and technical-

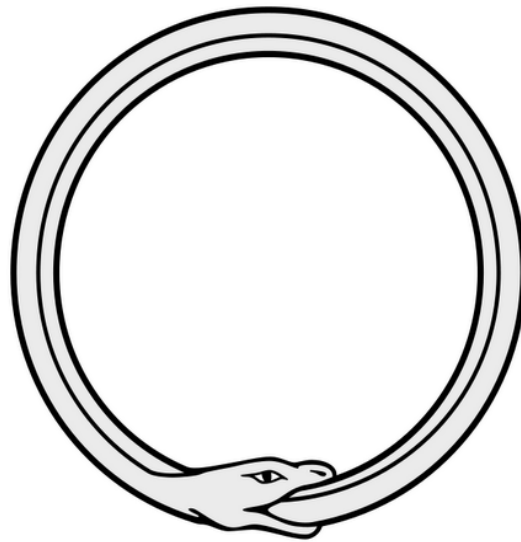
² In my speech I am using the word ‘reflection’ in a more general and at the same time in a specifically Flusserian sense. The general meaning encompasses every kind of intellectual activity, in the present case it is used for three specific processes, philosophizing, translating and projecting. Flusser, on the other hand, uses the word literally and only for the restricted area of philosophy.

images and has become, thus, a highly ambivalent and in a certain sense even negatively connotated metaphor. It is still a way to criticize historical progressive linearity but it is also an image of absolute standstill, of the perennial repetition inherent in the structure of the apparatus. In this new context, calculatory imagination and the possibility of synthesizing dotlike worlds on screens, become a viable alternative, articulating a new freedom arising from the apparatus itself but moving beyond it into a field of pure possibility. It is perhaps for this reason that Flusser turned in later texts to the metaphor of the cloud – already associated with freedom and creativity in the early Portuguese work – to formulate a new form of creative freedom.

The three metaphors of the circle, the spiral and the cloud are, moreover, related in many ways to the three other metaphors mentioned in the beginning. Fluidity is linked with circularity as well as with the idea of the spiral and the cloud, their common denominator being the breakup and dissolution of any clear-cut border, duality, hierarchy and systematicity in favor of an open ended fluid unsystematic conception of the world. The singular pebble extracted from the river, on the other hand, could be linked to Flusser's notion of calculatory imagination and the colorful clouds projected on computer screens. The idea of synthesis, finally, pervades Flusser's work from his early theory of translation to the very last texts on photography, video and computer. Translation and re-translation processes revolve on themselves incorporating new ideas as they move along in an attempt to create a synthesis which, however, always turns out to be only a momentary stop on a fluid spiral devouring itself in order to open up onto new possibilities. No synthesis is conclusive, as a circle, a spiral or a field of particles. In this way, the narrative of continuous creation and failure contained in the proper name Flusser could be reinterpreted from the point of view of the other three metaphors. The movement from fluidity to solidity to synthesis could be seen as a circle opening up to a spiral creating an open ended synthetic cloud that, however, calls for continuous redefinition through a return to fluidity.

Flusser defines the relationship of freedom and reflection as fundamentally complementary and circular. Freedom is a possible presupposition but also a consequence of reflection. Reflection can be translated into freedom and freedom can be retranslated into reflection. Reflection can turn into freedom and freedom can lead to further reflection. When we talk about the relationship of freedom and reflection we always have to consider the reflection on freedom alongside with the freedom of reflection. Flusser, furthermore, distinguishes between two forms of freedom: a freedom from *and* a freedom to. Nomadic thinking, the way Flusser practiced it, consists in abandoning fixed territorial or disciplinary positions in order to generate new surprising combinations. In this sense, each of the three metaphors I would like to discuss here defines a specific double relationship between reflection and freedom: reflection as a circle liberating us *from* the

strait-jacket of linear thinking, *allowing us* to view our own thinking from a distance; translation as a spiral *abolishing* hierarchical set-ups and dividing border lines, *opening up* the possibility of multiple mixings and creative feed-backs; and, finally, projection as a cloud *questioning* simplistic notions of objectivity and reality, *awakening* us to the beauty of the ephemeral, immaterial world of intersubjective dialogue.



Ouroboros

The first metaphor I would like to present here is the circle. When you think in circles you refuse the cumulative step by step approach of linearity. You bend the line back to its point of departure, freeing yourself from the constraints of a purely progressive approach to history. In the early essay *Pensamento e reflexão* written in the mid 1960ies Flusser distinguishes between two complementary forms of thinking: thought and reflection. „Que poder é esse, que acabo de mencionar e que chamei de reflexivo? Para iluminá-lo, voltemos por um instante a considerar o processo do pensamento [...]. Disse que o pensamento se precipita sobre os corpos para compreendê-los, e que se agarra a eles para modificá-los. O pensamento é portanto um processo explosivo que se expande para dentro do mundo dos corpos para devorá-los. O método desse devorar é a ciência e a tecnologia. Mas existe outro movimento do pensamento, um movimento oposto. Nesse movimento contrário o pensamento se vira contra si mesmo para compreender e devorar-se a si mesmo. A palavra ‘reflexão’ indica a direção desse movimento, já que denota um recuo em direção oposto ao avanço. A palavra correspondente alemã ‘Nachdenken’ (pensar atrás ou depois) indica a função desse movimento, já que denota controle. E a palavra correspondente tcheca ‘rozmyslení (pensar analítico) indica o resultado desse movimento, já que denota a decomposição do pensamento. A reflexão é portanto o movimento inverso do pensamento, que

o controla e o decompõe em seus elementos. O método desse compreender-se e modificar-se do pensamento é a filosofia. A filosofia é portanto exatamente o contrário da ciência e da tecnologia.“ (Flusser 2002: 39-40)

The word reflection comes from the Latin *reflectere*, to bend back, to turn around, and from *flectere*, to bend, to twist around. Reflection is a form of mirroring. When we reflect we follow with our reflection something that eludes and escapes us. It is the gesture of the hunter who builds his traps to ensnare his prey. When we reflect we also think about something that has already been thought and, above all, we think about the thinking process itself. For this reason, it is a motion gesturing backwards but not in the sense of a simple return to the origins. When we think about something that has already been thought we actually think backwards but we also move beyond it.

In Flusser's philosophy of translation the opposition of thinking and reflecting corresponds to that of translation and retranslation. In the same way that reflection reflects something back, retranslation translates something that has already been translated to its point of departure. This double structure underlays also Flusser's history of media evolution. Here images are replaced by texts which in turn are substituted by technical images. The first two steps can be seen as a form of transcoding or translation, the last step, on the other hand, can be considered a form of retranslation.

In Flusser's philosophy circle and line do not exclude each other. Circles are used to achieve a radical criticism of the notion of linear progress and to suggest unresolved existential problems. The circle is for Flusser also an ironical symbol of the fundamental questionability and dubiousness of all thinking, an image of the absurdity and futility of any thinking process, of the senselessness of an interminable quest endlessly turning on itself. This specific image reappears in Flusser's analysis of the *Pilpul*, a multilingual Jewish thinking strategy used in the Babylonian Talmud. As with the Ouroboros, reflection devours its own tail.

In the passage quoted above Flusser uses several times the metaphor of devoration distinguishing between two different forms: aggressive devoration and self-critical self-devoration. Science and technology and the linear conception of history on which they are based devour the world as they progressively appropriate it, philosophy, on the other hand, is a self-cannibalistic act in which thinking critically turns on itself and by doing this, inverts the direction. With Vilém Flusser, and this could be seen as his particular contribution to the discussion, anthropophagy becomes autophagy, cannibalism becomes self-cannibalism. Flusser's originality in the use of the metaphor of devoration lies in the fact that through self-translation he has basically applied the cannibalistic principle to the cannibalistic act of appropriation itself.

A danger inherent in the cannibalistic metaphor has to do with the sense that it might finally just invert the colonial power structure by exchanging roles, confirming the simple dichotomy of a familiar inner and foreign outer reality. Colonial appropriation tends to feed on the foreign, dissolving it in the familiar context and managing to abolish all traces of difference. As cannibalism appropriates colonial appropriation, it should arguably go beyond simple duality by translating de-centered positions into one another, inverting simple oppositions, cultivating involution and structural reversal, constantly bending back on itself in creating open-ended structures. To put it another way, it should devour the very border between the foreign and the familiar, devour the devourer and the act of devoration itself.

The second metaphor which is intimately linked to the practice of translation is the spiral. The spiral is based on the circle but moves beyond it by introducing repetition and plurality. The most interesting aspect of Flusser's spiral-shaped logic of translation and retranslation is the idea of reversal or mutuality and its consequences for hierarchical structures.



In Flusser's practice of re/translation – whereby the prefix re- means both again and back to the origin – the relationship between source and target text is fundamentally a reversible two-way flow and therefore not hierarchical. There is no privileged position from which to assess all other positions, as any position can be fed into a recursive loop of mutuality. Since Flusser interprets translation as a general mode of thinking and cultural production no scientific discourse or culture can claim a privileged position. What

remains is the constant playful reversal of hierarchical positions leading to new creative insights. Inexplicable heterogeneous elements that cannot readily be explained in terms of the target language or culture do not hinder or stop, but tend to energize the operational drive of the transaction processes leading to further attempts at explanation. The mechanism of recursive looping is an appropriate operational mode for translating texts, discourses and cultures into one another.

This notion based on Flusser's concept of dialogue is also of fundamental importance within his media-theory. Dialogical media as the telephone and the computer work according to a two-

way reversible flow of information allowing a constant switching of roles, thus, eliminating ideally any kind of hierarchical divide. Flusser's (pluri)linguistic model and his dynamic view of translational processes as creative acts can, moreover, be used to reinterpret intercultural dialogues. From his point of view, cultures are not self-contained unities, but constantly shifting overlapping and merging entities, without clear-cut borders. Cultures – and languages for that matter – are not countable. They always already contain signs of other cultures. Contamination and mixing are inevitable. Intercultural exchanges could, thus, be viewed as creative translational acts during which the foreign and the familiar are playfully reinvented.

In 1977 in a speech held at the University of Marseille-Luminy Flussers proposed a complex plurilingual translation game that could be reinterpreted as a critical mode of cognition consciously renouncing any privileged hierarchical point of view. If one translates one language into another one can consider the first language as the object and the second as the meta-language because – as skopos theory posits – translational decisions are made from the standpoint of the target language. In this view, contrary to a more traditional notion of translation affirming the superiority of the original over the translation, it is the target language that dictates the function of the translation. The same holds true for cross-cultural interactions: Migrants or refugees are generally asked or simply forced to adapt to the culture that admits them. For this reasons Flusser calls the meta-language and the cultural point of view from which the decisions are taken an imperialistic meta-code.

The *Sprachspiel* of translation, however, can be reversed any time thanks to retranslation. It can also be carried on ad infinitum with the consequence that no hierarchy can finally establish itself. There is no language or point of view to which all others can be reduced. In this game object and meta-language keep exchanging their roles. In turn, each language is democratically called to exert its power only to be substituted by another which will be allowed to play the ruling role only for so long. In the following passage explaining the process from a linguistic point of view Flusser makes use once more of the metaphor of devoration. Cannibalism is a fundamentally carnevalistic device, playfully turning power relations upside down. “Translating from English into French”, writes Flusser, “is completely different from translating French into English. In the first case French is the meta-code of English and English the object-code of the French code. In the second case the relationship of the two codes is reversed. In the first case I decide in function of the French, in the second in function of the English code. [...] In the case of retranslation the original relationship of the two codes is reversed: the object-code becomes now the meta-code. In other words: after the French code has swallowed part of the [...] English one, he is in turn swallowed by the English code, [...] so to speak with the English in his belly. [...] And during

this process the two codes enrich each other more and more without getting nearer to each other”

In the essay *Retradução enquanto método de trabalho* Flusser adds: „Por certo: tal retradução recorrente em espiral é formalizável. É perfeitamente viável formalizá-la enquanto adequação de várias sintaxes que ‘overlap’ uma sobre a outra, e enquanto adequação de vários léxicos inter-relacionados. [...]. Trata-se de tomar toda língua disponível enquanto meta-língua das demais, e depois tomar tais línguas-objeto enquanto meta-línguas da sua própria meta-língua. Mas tal formalização do problema da retradução levará a perder o encanto do jogo.“ (Flusser 2013)

In the last translation – that is very often a retranslation – all the points of view that have been passed through in the course of the process of translation are cumulated and are, thus, to use Flusser’s own metaphor, contained in the belly of the last text. This notion corresponds to a principle of nesting that one also comes across with Russian dolls. In Flusser’s model, however,



each of the nested dolls is different from the others. Even if the first and the last text of a retranslation process are generally written in the same language they represent two completely different versions: the last comes into being only at the end and contains all other versions. The game of translation is basically open-ended, always regenerating itself from inside. Each synthesis reached must finally fail as vestiges of untranslatability remain within every finished text. This failure, nevertheless, becomes a reason for further

processes of translation and retranslation.

The phenomenological dance around the subject is linked in Flusser’s view not only with the work of the multilingual writer and the photographer but also with *Pilpul*, a Jewish practice of textual interpretation. The starting point for Flusser’s analysis is the non-linear structure of the page of the Babylonian Talmud: „In the middle of the page is a word or a few words and around the nub of the page revolve some concentric textual circles. [...] These circles not only comment the core but also one another. This is called *Pilpul*.“ (Flusser 1995: 144) [translation RG] The different concentric rings that form around the central core as in a tree in the course of time have been written at different times, by different authors, in different languages creating a text thicket, kicking off a circular movement that can neither be ended nor completed. The commentaries beleaguer the core of the page and are at the same time directed against each other. It is a field of circling points of view that attract and repulse each other. “It is as if *Pilpul* had moved from a true/false to a multirooted logic.” In Flusser’s work simple dualisms are constantly dissolved into

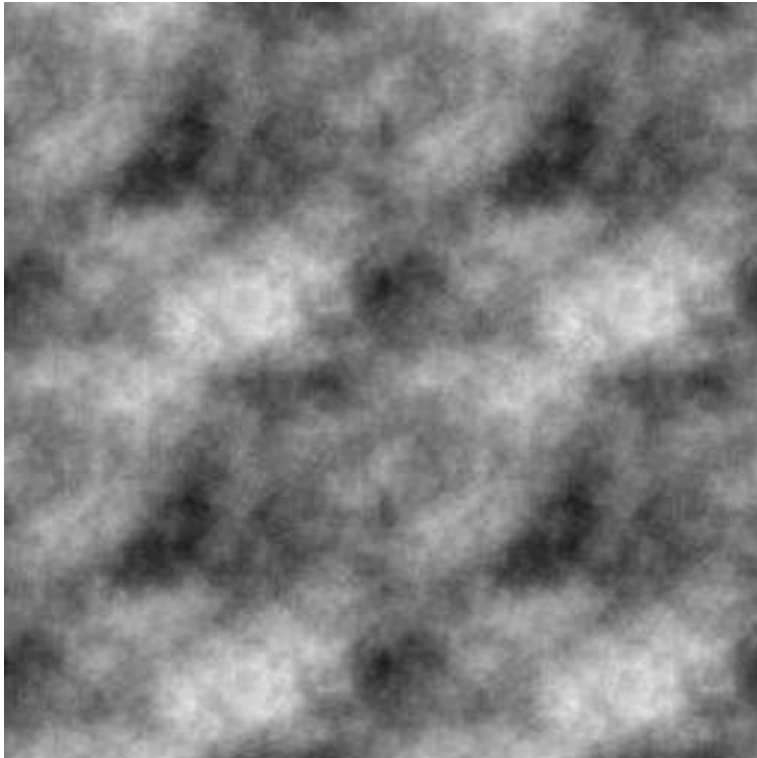
a multiplicity of distinct perspectives. Pilpul means to approach a subject from as many points of view as possible making them clash with each other. The subject is surrounded by an „inexhaustible swarm of points of view that would be perceived completely only if all the points of view could be exhausted.“ (ibidem: 150) [translation RG] Truth is a limit value that can never be reached but made more concrete by increasingly accumulating specific points of view.



Page from the Babylonian Talmud

I would now like to introduce the third model, the cloud and the practice of projecting. In the introduction to Flusser’s unachieved book *Vom Subjekt zum Projekt* – From Subject to Project – part of which has been published posthumously, thinking in post-modern times is defined as a groundless nebulous enterprise. We have definitely lost our faith and trust in the solidity of things and in the materiality of the world, writes Flusser who recapitulates the path from early modern and inexorable discovery of a general principle of cloudiness. „In the course of the modern era numerical thinking has penetrated more and more deeply into things but instead of reaching the ground it has dissolved things into wafts of mist that float in nothingness. But this is not the essential moment yet. While bending over things it has dissolved itself into wafts of mist floating in nothingness. This uncanny process is generally termed euphemistically ‘Enlightenment’ confusing fog with clarity.“ (Flusser 1994: 11-2) [translation RG]. These two converging tendencies implying each other have shown that subject and object possess the same numerical, that is, dot-like

structure. Because of this, both decompose into “swarms of particles.”(ibidem: 10) [translation RG].



Digital cloud

We come across this new world consisting of particles also on TV and computer screens. The ghostly figures that emerge from them are dots agglomerated into shapes. It is possible, thus, to deduce new forms of thinking from the appearance of new media. The gestures of video artists, film directors, photographers and computer programmers bear witness to a radically different way of projecting models. In the universe of technical images this is no longer done by cutting and gluing, by collage, but by imagining, in German *einbilden*. It is important to point out here that Flusser opposes the term *Einbildungskraft* to the older term imagination. *Einbildungskraft* is a new form of imagination made possible by the development of the new media. It is a programming and informing gesture that by the simple push of a button gives form to dots buzzing around in nothingness.

Interestingly enough, the notion of nothingness that we have already come across in the passage from *A Dívida* turns up again more than twenty years later in a completely different context. Flusser uses the concept of nothingness as a manifold metaphor throughout his work. In *A história do diabo* it is an image of God, in his translation theory it stands for the abyss between languages and in the later work of the 1980ies and early 1990ies it is a boundless field of possibilities.

The common denominator of the metaphor is the Cabbalistic idea that nothingness is a living presence, not a threshold that has been overcome once and for all through creation, but a reservoir of strength from which we can draw new energies whenever need arises.

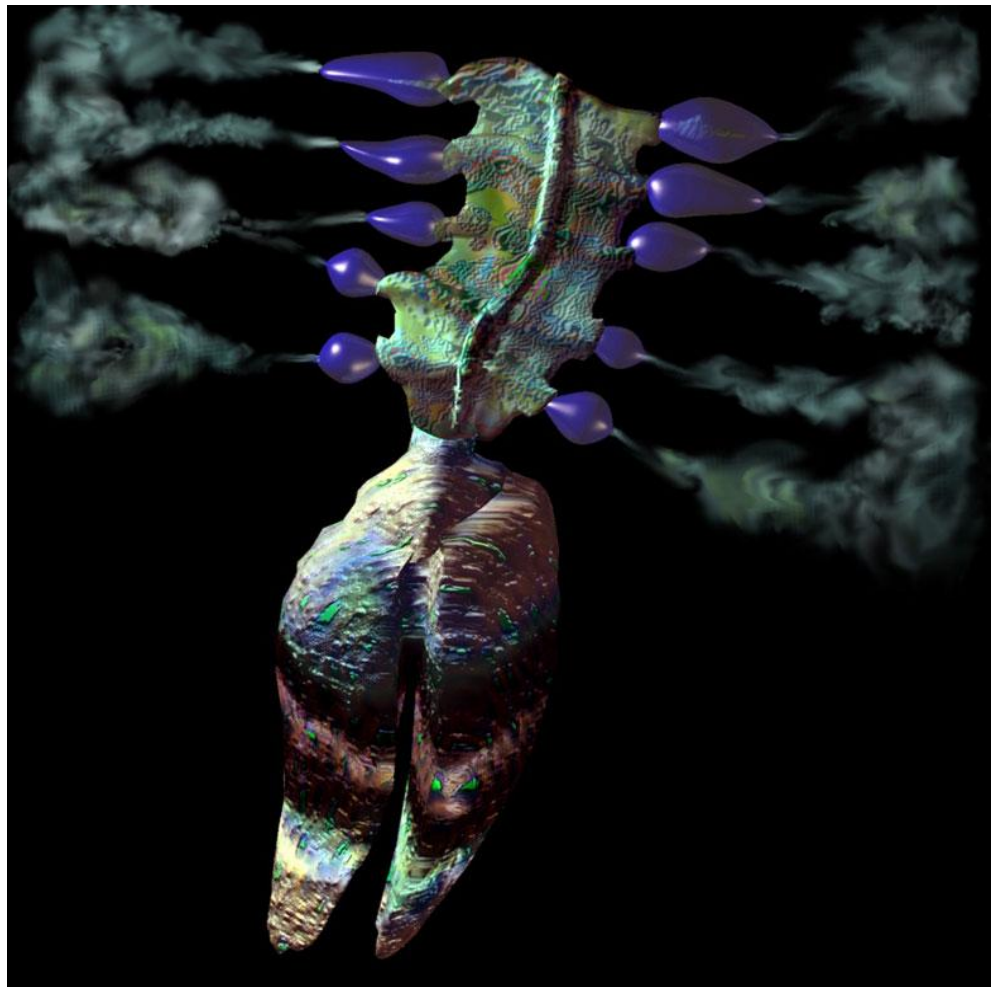
The computerization of the gesture of modeling shows what “computation of dots” (Flusser 1993: 43) [translation RG] actually means. In this new context the attempt to find one’s way back to concreteness – which according to Flusser determines the whole media revolution from the very beginning – is an assembling and agglomerating gesture. In the following quotation the idea of extraction linked to the Flusser’s name is taken up again from another point of view. “Models are cotton balls that are extracted from nothingness. The cotton-like, cloudy, ungraspable and at the same time incomprehensible, but also easily malleable and mutable nature of our models explains the existential climate in which we live. We walk in patches of fog.” (ibidem: 43) [translation RG]

The modeling gesture of the computer-programmer sums up the metaphorical narrative contained in the proper name ‘Flusser’: he extracts bits (pebbles) from nothingness (a flowing river) in order to create a new surprising unity (a synthesis) on his screen. The difference with the creation of proper names is that in the former linguistic version of the narrative words are extracted and then transformed by conversation into prose. There remains, thus, a fundamental difference between poetic diction and prosaic everyday use of language. In the later technological version the pebbles extracted from nothingness are numbers or metaphorically speaking bits. From these the computer-programmer directly elaborates through calculation a new informative synthesis. Flusser repeatedly pointed to the etymological origin of the word calculation which comes from the Latin *calculus* meaning small stone used for counting.

The title *Vom Subjekt zum Projekt* indicates a central aspect of the epochal change we are going through. Flusser uses the word subject in its literal sense. As subjects we have capitulated to the objects surrounding us. Subject comes from the Latin *subiectum*, that which is subjacent. He who believes only in the concrete objective reality does not know anything of the freedom of projecting. “Presently, there are numerous symptoms that point to the fact that we are beginning to draw ourselves up into a projective attitude. That we no longer bow before or over something, but that we have begun to be projective. [...] We have reached a catastrophic point from which it is no longer possible to get out of the affair. [...] There is nothing left which we can hold on to [...] neither to things nor to ourselves. Out of this desperate plight (from this loss of faith) we begin to project – ‘we’ is to be understood not as a group of individuals but as a network-like dialogue. Since we are no longer capable of identifying ourselves [as subjects], we have begun to accept ourselves as nodal points within a dialogical net and this intersubjective net as a relational field [and] it is the very radicalness of this loss of faith that can turn out to be a field opening up

to freedom. Only after we have put everything that is solid (formerly ‘real’) into brackets [...] can we try to project solidity and orientation onto the surging and undulating field of points in us and around us. [...] This formulation [...] implies that all knowledge and values are projections emanating from a temporary consensus and that freedom consists in participating in the elaboration of consensus and in its projection.“ (Flusser 1994: 24-27) [translation RG].

I would like to conclude my speech with two longer quotations from the English translation of the Portuguese version of *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* which, in a way, sum up most of what has been presented so far.



Louis Bec, Protospone Mex (Kruptoïdones)³

Contrary to human beings who throughout their evolution had to deal with solid material things in order to survive, *Vampyroteuthis* lives within a liquid immaterial environment, inside the *Urfluss* of nothingness and chaos. Flusser describes him as a screwlike animal winding himself

³ <http://www.flusserstudies.net/pag/archive04.htm>.

around his own axis, an Ouroboros at the bottom of the sea, in whose body the head fuses with the foot and the mouth feeds on its own tail: a circle and a winding spiral. Vampyroteuthes secrete sepia clouds which they manipulate with their tentacles. These clouds have different functions. One is the projection of information on the swarm of particles that surrounds them in order to communicate with other members of their species.

With the Vampyroteuthis the relationship of reflection and freedom assumes new surprising forms. It is, however, not so much the liberating flight from linearity into the self-devouring circle, or the overcoming of hierarchies through the playful practice of nesting, it is a creative principle of projection subverting the solidity of the world of objects and the easy certainties of objectivity in the name of a radical notion of immateriality and dialogical intersubjectivity. „The diverticulum, which secretes sepia clouds, serves in more primitive species as a defense mechanism. The animal emits a cloud, models it to copy its own contours and escapes. The aggressor attacks the clouds and the animal saves itself. In Vampyroteuthis this function is different. In more primitive species it has been observed that the cloud is manipulated not only to copy the contour of the animal but also to assume other forms. Vampyroteuthis does not limit himself only to produce self-portraits. Clouds that are manipulated by him assume a variety of forms and serve as support for a variety of messages. [...] Sepia clouds are media for intersubjective communication. They are extremely plastic, ephemeral and fluid media, therefore easily graspable and of highly dubious and connotative interpretation. But one thing is certain: the diverticulum's original function is to mislead the enemy. It is a stratagem. [...] Messages emitted by Vampyroteuthis through the medium of sepia are lies.” (Flusser 2011: 90-1) Flusser's description of the communicative use of sepia clouds could be interpreted in a Nietzschean sense. Flusser repeatedly quoted Nietzsche's saying that 'art is better than truth'. Nietzsche affirms the false as the basis for all existence in order to highlight the power to make exist. The powers of the false, thus, designate the powers to create.

Contrary to human beings who create art mainly by manipulating the external world of objects, and because of this tend to value the work of art more than the information contained in it, the Vampyroteuthis secretes clouds from his own body and shapes them with his tentacles focusing on their intersubjective dimension. Vampyroteuthis “uses the sepia cloud to transmit acquired information. [...] The cloud does not fascinate Vampyroteuthis like marble fascinates man, because the cloud is not strange to him. As he models the cloud Vampyroteuthis is fascinated, just like man as he models marble. However, Vampyroteuthis is fascinated by the effect that the modeled cloud will have upon another Vampyroteuthis. His fascination is not objective but intersubjective. [...] Vampyroteuthis reflects: as opposed to other less evolved octopi, he controls and reprogrammes his own genetic programme in function of deliberate decisions. The experi-

ence that Vampyroteuthis has just gone through must be expressed in the cloud, no longer with the intention to divert a hypothetical aggressor, but to store this experience in the memory of another Vampyroteuthis. The cloud should not astound a hypothetical aggressor but should astound another Vampyroteuthis with the intention of forcing him to store the experience. The cloud must ‘*épater le bourgeois*’ so that they remember what happened. The purpose of modelling the cloud is to divert the attention of the other Vampyroteuthis away from his intention, and to direct it towards the new information. So that the other Vampyroteuthes are drawn towards the cloud and devour it thinking that they are devouring the sender of the message. Thenceforth the new information shall be incorporated into the vampyroteuthian dialogue forever by method of deliberate deception, artifice and lies. ‘Art’. [...] Vampyroteuthian art is a series of artifices [...] transmitted through the intermediation of ephemeral and despised objects. That is why there is neither ‘pure art’, nor ‘pure science’, nor ‘pure politics’ for Vampyroteuthis. Vampyroteuthis is always a ‘total artist’.” (ibidem: 110ff) Vampyroteuthis stands for the fluid, boundless and ephemeral. He is the ultimate synthesis of art, science and politics, a total artist. He is circle, spiral and cloud, all in one.

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