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"The Lens is to Blame":

Three Remarks on Black Boxes, Digital Humanities, and

The Necessities of Vilém Flusser's "New Humanism"

"The Lens is to blame," writes Vilém Flusser in the essay "Orders of Magnitude and Humanism." This fundamental apparatus is to blame for showing us "great things in human semen, so that it became impossible to hold it in contempt and disgust […]" and thus initiated "the penetration of in-human orders of magnitude into concrete everyday life (2002: 160). I have always been provoked by the way in which Flusser's choice of terms and metaphors seems to simultaneously invoke a posthumanist visual culture and the human being's Enlightenment vocation of values and reason. Specifically, "humanism" itself prompts a flurry of questions. If, as Flusser proposes, humankind has emerged on the other side of an epistemological shift that de-centered the human and rendered it a cybernetic being—one that exists as accretions of information in a network—then what would the word "humanism" mean? Why does Flusser even invoke *humanism* when it would now apply to a world stripped of the intellectual trappings that originally allowed this term to flourish and within which the term is understandable in the first place? And why is the concept left unelaborated in his works and unused further, unlike terms such as freedom and dignity, which seem to bear the same complications?

It is not within the scope or intent of this brief contribution to attend to the questionable assumption that this transition has already happened or is indeed in the process of occurring; what interests me here are the reasons Flusser deploys the human subject and humanism at the same time he assumes that the shift away from the world of the European Enlightenment has indeed already occurred. For him, this world, along with its intellectual proponents such as Goethe, lies far behind us. For that matter, then, what would the entire project of the *humanities* look like in this historical-technological situation?

In provoking these questions, Flusser makes particular demands that, in a manner of prescience we are accustomed to attributing to him, are significant to the thinking of practices we now discuss as the digital humanities. At the moment, as has been recently observed, the term may "mean anything from media studies to electronic art, from data mining to edutech, from scholarly editing to

anarchic blogging, while inviting code junkies, digital artists, standards wonks, transhumanists, game theorists, free culture advocates, archivists, librarians, and edupunks under its capacious canvas" (Ramsay 2013). Yet despite the absence of a more specific definition, there exists an unavoidable reality that the humanities now exist in a digital world and are inextricably intertwined with its material conditions.

In its dedication to Flusser, this conference[1] is also in fact a laboratory for a discussion of the relationship between technology and humanist scholarship. When we discuss the digital humanities, we must, however, consider not only the ways in which the humanities are practiced through digital media (by taking advantage of technology to teach, research, and publish), but also the question of what it means to produce humanistic scholarship in the digital world—that is: what *are* the humanities in the face of the bare fact of the digital world's existence? In addition to utilizing new technologies, is it not also the role of the humanities' within the horizon of their digital form to examine and critique that horizon itself?

This is Flusser's territory and an undervalued contribution of his *oeuvre*. Not only is he a so-called "prophet" of digital media and the Internet, but also a dialogical and moral thinker whose works demonstrate that neither of these two facets is reducible to the other. I consider his demand for a new *humanism*, one which would reckon with new technological realities, an exemplary case of the relationship between the persistent master terms of the Enlightenment and humanistic investigation and a digitality that remains haunted by these concepts even as it recodes them. Thus I will spend much of my time here with "Orders of magnitude and Humanism," but I will also bring in other works to show that the concept of a "new humanism" is indeed something of an umbrella term, or rather a conceit that bundles lines of thinking that run throughout Flusser's work.

His retention of humanism (and the humane), with its links to law and politics, highlights the particular value Flusser's writings have for our so-called information age: their potential to analyze intersections of medial technologies, politics, and economics—an increasingly relevant constellation, as evolving global technological and economic interdependency simultaneously advance the 'first world' to new heights of prosperity, while the number of 'third world' refugees and internally displaced persons—often without access to these advancements—grows. That is to say, a world in which media and technology analyses like Flusser's are an important contribution to any conception of social justice, that is, to address the human and its associated institutional disciplines within its increasingly digital horizon.

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[1] The initial version of this article was presented at "reMEDIAting Flusser: a Symposium and Digital Humanities Project" at the University of Connecticut (November 1-3, 2013).

I: On the Human Apparatus

Attention to the ethical and cultural implications of changing technologies is, of course, not unique to Flusser, and the varied attempts to work with through the posthuman or posthumanism cover much of the same ground as Flusser's analyses. Indeed, a post*humanism* must necessarily engage the tradition to which it adds the prefix "post," though it seeks to modify it. From the posthumanist perspective formed within a cybernetic framework, this modification "configures the human being," as N. Katherine Hayles writes in her seminal book, *How we Became Posthuman*, "so that […] there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals," (1999: 3). The stakes of a post-humanist project, then, are to collapse the difference between the two in order to overcome the philosophical paradigm that places the autonomous, self-possessed Enlightenment subject over and against the world and according to whose interests the world is narrated and organized.

Not surprisingly, then, much has been written about surpassing traditional humanism's position of mastery from within a discourse of animal rights. Cary Wolfe outlines this project in in *What is Posthumanism?*: "My concern here will be to show the limits of philosophical humanism for thinking about the status of nonhuman beings and our relations and duties to them." Thus the status of the animal, as he continues, does not simply retrace the ontological and ethical line between human and nonhuman, which "may still be quite humanist on an internal theoretical and methodological level" (2010: 62). It is, in fact, a part of a larger question, of "who and what can count as a subject of ethical address" (2010: 49). Hayles and Wolfe are only two prominent examples from a list that would also need to include Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Friedrich Kittler, Bruno Latour, Bernhard Siegert, and Wolfgang Ernst, to name a selection of representative thinkers with varied methodological backgrounds who take part in posthumanist discourse.[2] Common to the diverse strains of posthumanism,

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[2] A representative selection of works: Butler, Judith (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge; Haraway, Donna (1991) "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge; Kittler, Friedrich (1999) *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford: Stanford UP; Latour, Bruno (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard UP; Siegert, Bernhard (Forthcoming 2015) *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors and Other Articulations of the Real*. New York: Fordham UP.

however, is the gesture is an attempt to de-privilege the human subject, to be able to conceive a new type of interaction within a non-anthropocentric world, one we share with "non-human subjects" (Wolfe 2010: 47). The continuing stakes of the questions Flusser's work addresses are intertwined with very definitions and contours of what may count as a subject and as ethics, and thus of the entire scaffolding of political, legal, and cultural structures built upon this foundation.

In light of this general constellation of questions and concerns, Flusser's work can (and should) be considered a voice within the posthumanist discourse, though he stakes out his own territory regarding the effect of technological development on the human. I would argue that Flusser's commitment to the human's embodiment distinguishes him from contemporary permutations of posthumanism. Even if at times his analyses fit comfortably within the history of cybernetic theory, Flusser breaks with those lines of thought such as Hayles' that, as Wolfe writes, pairs "posthuman with a kind of triumphant disembodiment" (2010: xv). Yet he does not completely reject it, either. Flusser rather incorporates the data-driven procedures and technologies that characterize the contemporary world into his thinking of the (post)human subject, an approach that also puts him in communication with a different field altogether. Hayles provides a clear connection point for Flusser's work in contemporary digital discourses when she describes the digital humanities as a "diverse field of practices associated with computational techniques and reaching beyond print in its modes of inquiry […]" (2012: 27). Though many of the names associated with two disciplinary markers are the same, posthumanism is not identical to the digital humanities. While the former can be generally be said to concern itself with the theoretical and ethical consequences of a subject altered by changing technological techniques, the latter is concerned with the way in which these techniques are used to practice what is still called the humanities. I believe that Flusser's new humanism circulates between these positions.

As regards the expanses that lay between these various theoretical positions, the inclusion of contemporary German scholars among them is crucial for my reading of Flusser, precisely because of his famously nomadic biography and his position within intellectual history on both sides of the Atlantic. There is a real, but not insurmountable, schism between practitioners working under the general umbrella of media studies. The distinction follows the same fault line as between the human and non-human. On the Anglo-American side, the category of the Animal stands in as the reflexive other of the human, complicating the categories upon which ethical and legal action is based. This concern with ethics is, however, dismissed by a prominent representative of the German side, Bernhard Siegert, who believes that without a "technologically oriented decentering there is the danger of confusing ethics with sentimentality: the human/animal difference remains caught in a mirror stage,

and the humanity that is exorcised from humans is simply transferred onto animals which now appear as the better humans" (2013: 56). Contemporary German media studies under the banner of "cultural techniques" overwhelmingly focuses on the non-humanity of medial technologies themselves and the ways in which they are inseparable from the human in the realm of culture. I raise this distinction within the larger horizon of media studies, a discipline with which Flusser is commonly associated, because I believe it to be analogous to these other divisions. It is also my suspicion that Flusser could, in a similar way, be seen as existing between and among the various positions, perhaps forming a trans-Atlantic bridge. Because questions of the impact of new technologies depends in each case on the composition of these non-human subjects (and thus of the human subject), I begin here with Flusser's definition of an evolving human subject within the technologized world.

A bedrock assumption subtending Flusser's analyses is that a historical epistemological shift occurs with the appearance of apparatuses. In Flusser's work, 'apparatus' is a technical term with a precise definition elaborated in his most well-known work, *Toward a Philosophy of Photography*: It is a machine or system that mimics a function of the body or thought and produces "a new kind of function in which human beings are neither the constant nor the variable but in which human beings and apparatus merge into a unity (2000: 27)". The unity is then directed by codes—the material and technical rules governing their use. Bracketing off the essence of the relationship between the two in this book, Flusser then demonstrates the way in which apparatus and operator only exist as aspects of each other's functioning. This is his most phenomenological gesture—there is no photographer without the camera and no photograph without the photographer. They exist as a "machine/operator complex" of functions that work as a "black box" to produce photographs (2000:16). His language shifts, however from "operator" toward a more resolute use of the term "functionaries, who control a game over which they have no competence" (2000: 27). The human subject in this relationship appears to lose its agency; the operator seems mostly subject to an apparatus that establishes the program of possibilities for existence.

Though he does not term it such, the appearance of the technical image and the apparatus heralds the rise of the digital, and the problematic of the photography book therefore becomes the attempt to locate the possibility of freedom in an increasingly techno-deterministic world. In the case of photography, freedom from absolute technical determinism is possible in the actions of photographers, *avant-garde* and otherwise, who try to push against the camera's existing program and, thus, produce something new. It is a moment of detachment, of irony in which one may criticize the codes of which he or she is a functionary. As Flusser begins speaking of codes in the general, however, the scope of the analysis widens. Photographers are, for example, functionaries of an apparatus which,

"if analysis is extended back far enough, reaches into capital, corporations, politics and economics, a series of black boxes each governed by an elite of functionaries who nonetheless are prisoners of their own apparatus" (Cubitt 2004: 404). For there to be cameras in the first place, the conditions for their production must also be in place—politically, economically, scientifically, and materially. Flusser's analysis of the apparatus fills a space opened by Foucault's analysis of power, but from an oblique angle: rather than finding the routes through which power is asserted as a function of social systems, the development of a Flusserian analysis traces the trajectory of society as a function of the effects of apparatuses, which can be economic, political, or linguistic, as well as technological in the strict sense. The analysis and critique of apparatuses may thus then be applied on multiple registers and in multiple fields. Thus this detour through his notion of the apparatus outlines what I take to be the stakes of his body of work—that his philosophy has been an ethics and a social and political critique all along, one prompted I think by suffering human bodies. In a sense, Flusser's technological and communicological analyses are in total humanistic investigation.

Of course, the central plank of a discussion of humanism will necessarily be the definition of the human itself. One version comes from this apparatus analysis, but a complement can be found in its most general form in the title of one of his books: *From Subject to Project*. Here, rather than being founded upon some original, unified self, as has been the dominant model of the human since the Enlightenment, it is implied that we have to check back later; "the human" is in fact an ongoing process of "humanization,"[3] and the apparatus-conditioned subject exhibits remarkable differences to that which came before. Varying explications of this relationship may be found throughout Flusser's *oeuvre*, but here I turn to a moment in an interview he gave with Patrik Tschudin for its unscripted candor, scope, and brevity: "[…] Nothing that *can* be mechanized is worthy of being done by human beings! To put it another way, a person becomes human to the extent to which he figures out which of one's functions can be mechanized and then delegates those to machines. What remains, that which cannot be mechanized (for the moment, anyway), is that which becomes human." (Flusser 2003: 99)

This is, to adopt Flusser's own rhetorical flair, a startling claim. It posits a human essence that is no way essential—it is rather historicized, in flux, and what is "for the moment, anyway." Additionally, he affirms that within the ongoing process of humanization the human is determined by the various technologies with which it interacts, meaning that that which is historicized is thus the history of technology, which defines the human in the second place and in negative relief. On one hand, then,

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[3] See, in particular, Flusser's essay "Humanizations," in *Writings* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2002) 181-91.

Flusser's theories seem to align with other, techno-determinist strains of media and technology studies (such as Friedrich Kittler's) in which technology plays the role of the world's prime mover. This reading would seem to be affirmed by the next sentences: "The computer mechanized freedom of choice […] Then, what is truly human is that we, in cooperation with other competent people and machines displaying artificial intelligence, work out the values so that they [computers] may make decisions. We have crept out past freedom of choice, if I may put it that way. The computer creates a new anthropology." (2003: 99)

Here he is referring to a chess-playing computer, which provides the "nicest example" (2003: 98) of a machine's ability to make choices by following, at inhuman speeds, the branches of a decision tree. The functions to be delegated, then, are the functions of thinking. This proxy structure may be one of the reasons he says that this entire process of humanization is "something we can't even imagine" (Flusser 2003: 99), because mental tasks will have been handed over to an apparatus to which "we" (as functionaries of different apparatuses) have no relationship. I will return to this question of our inability to picture, or even conceive, this human subject momentarily, but for now I wish to urge that, while the new humanism must lie with computers, the situation is not as deterministic and imprisoning as it first seems. In Flusser, as opposed to other media-inflected schools of thought in that more Kittlerian vein, the definition of the human is not completely subjected to the evolution of technologies, but rather that new technologies may also be incorporated into the human. "In this age of computation," writes Flusser in reference to art criticism, "we are beginning to learn that exact theoretical understanding is not necessarily less 'human' than is intuition" (2002: 52). Other culturally accepted markers of humanity are likewise not erased, but rather rerouted and recoded. Culture, for Flusser, indeed functions through rule-governed structures like an apparatus, and systems like language and social interaction can be measured by their information content. Human activity thus becomes information processing—and this is why we may refer to the system as "cybernetic."[4]

The question then becomes one of whether of the human is defined as a generic, abstract figure by the historical technological moment in which the species exists ("for the moment, anyway"), or whether various humans are conditioned *in situ*, determined by the particular constellation in which life forms (or in extreme cases a single life form) exist at a given place and time? That he writes: "Computers create a new anthropology," suggests that the very existence of apparatuses on Earth

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[4] For a more complete elaboration of the cybernetic nature of Flusser's human subject as it regards culture's information-processing character, see: Chadwick Smith, "'Inter, but not national': Vilém Flusser and the Technologies of Exile," in *Escape to Life: German Intellectuals in New York*, ed. Eckart Goebel and Sigrid Wiegel (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011) 499-509.

have altered the species as a whole. The existence of a computer is already a consequence of the series of nested black boxes that already encircles the globe.

This structure represents a particular kind of leap into generality. There is an explicit and historical bridge to a politics here, as the extension of these material conditions approaches political and juridical concerns associated with the humanism that is the object of our concern. The question of the definition of the human to which it could attach here mirrors (to cite only one prominent example) Hannah Arendt's well-known statement on the paradoxes of human rights after the French Revolution: "man had hardly appeared as a completely emancipated, completely isolated being who carried his dignity within himself without reference to some larger encompassing order, when he disappeared again into a member of a people. From the beginning the paradox involved in the declaration of inalienable human rights was that it reckoned with an "abstract" human being who seemed to exist nowhere." (Arendt 1976: 291)

She is commenting on a watershed period and philosophical framework within the Western tradition. Yet it is one that Flusser will claim, as we will see, has been left far behind. Flusser's black boxes are, however, not only a technical analogue to Arendt's political perplexity, they are intertwined with, and in some ways a result of, it: "The whole complex of apparatuses is therefore a super-black-box made up of black boxes. And it is a human creation: As a product of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, human beings are permanently engaged in developing and perfecting it." (2000: 71)

At this point, a perplexity within Flusser's work emerges as well; at the same time this conception of the global network of apparatuses provides a baseline for comparative analysis across diverse registers, he also claims, that we also need to redefine "*Man* […] Because since the demise of humanism, we can no longer speak of man in the general anymore" (1999: 30). It could be the case, then, that the same tension found in some of the most crucial facets in humans' lives is present in Flusser's outline of the human. Namely, lying in the very relationship necessary to the construction of law, justice, or Human Rights—that of the particular to the universal, or (to use anachronistic language) of a man to Man with a capital "M"? This tension will be manifest in Flusser's work through an incompatibility of metaphors.

II: Within Humanism's New Scope

We may now turn to the essay that initially provoked this essay: "Orders of Magnitude and Human-

ism." Subtending this text's explicit call for a new humanism is a metaphor analogous to the black boxes: that of nested *matrjoschka* dolls. The interaction between these metaphors, however, complicates the answers to the series of questions that is foundational for this analysis of humanism: Can we move seamlessly between the boxes nested within one and other; or between registers of vastly different scales and values, from talking about *a* starving child to the intricacies of global economic policy (to take his example); or between instances of different forms of technology? The two metaphors seemingly function in the same way in Flusser's texts, though they lead to contradictory conclusions.

"We are somewhere in the interior of *matrjoschka*," he writes, "a hierarchy of orders of magnitude in which each contains all smaller ones and is contained by all bigger ones" (2002: 161). The human scale, the one recognizable in relation to humans, is an ancient one: "At the time of the ancients, the island of centimeters, hours, and dollars that was inhabited by human beings was surrounded by the immeasurable world […] At present hardly anything of this measured Mediterranean landscape can be noticed anymore." (2002: 161)

At that time, one could still believe that "Man is the measure of all things," and something as large as the sea or as small as a grain of sand were comparatively unmeasurable, and "outside of the human norm. Things that were big without measure had to be worshipped; things that were small without measure could be held in contempt" (2002: 160).

The situation changed dramatically around 1543. Beginning with the discovery of the lens, humans gained access to these other planes of measure during a period called "—not to put too fine a point on it – the 'Copernican Revolution.'" Pointiness is crucial, however, as Flusser continues: "But we have to put a fine point on it, for it is just what is pointy about it that hits us in our glands, guts, and heart, deep in our marrow and brain" (2002: 161). In other essays by Flusser we find the same gesture of reduction to organs, invoking litanies of viscerality as an anchor to a particular scale of human existence. The danger posed to human beings comes from the fact that "we only have marrow and bone in the margin between 10^{-5} and 10^{5} cm and between decades and seconds" (2002: 162). Outside of this the human as we know it imperceptible—the body as such only exists in this scale, the one perceptible by our senses. When one zooms in, identifiable units shift to the cellular or molecular level; zoom out and the tooth or bone cannot be seen, lost in the larger image (such as a hand cannot be seen when looking at the Earth as a whole). His objective is to point out that when we leave this scale, the human as such disappears. This is what is 'pointy.'

The demand for a new humanism is then posed as a question of "what we are actually doing when we jump from doll to doll, from measure to measure, from scale of values to scale of values,"

because "without a doubt, we must differentiate between orders of magnitude. If we do not, we cause nonsense and mischief" (2002: 161). He provides examples of nonsense and mischief, including the unnecessary application of Einsteinian relativity to production of ballpoint pens, or the deployment of a vocabulary of race (measured in evolutionary time) within the political arena (measured in decades). The problems thus begin when we apply values proper to an order in which humans don't exist to humans. His point is that there are values and theories proper to each order, and the indifference to these differences describes what he identifies as barbarism.

Complicating the matter, however, is the fact that the dolls are not hermetically sealed; they are also somewhat "permeable by the other. It is especially these grey zones between the orders of magnitude that set our teeth on edge" (2002: 162). Because in these zones "dwell artificial intelligence, artificial life, and artificial immortality." The new humanism, therefore, "would have to criticize the grey zones" (2002: 163), for they are where our scale and value begin to admit others.

While the ancient barbarism couldn't measure things too small or too large (and thus disdained or worshipped them, respectively), the new barbarism is barbarism *by means of* measurement. It is the endgame of the Enlightenment Project, as it is all, for Flusser, entirely rational: "The Enlightenment has overshot its mark. Extreme rationalism [...] turns into the irrational" and "The new barbarism, and not the traditional humanism, is the ultimate enlightenment" (2002: 163). The dialectic pivot he makes here is of course a well-practiced turn in the history of philosophy. A close cousin to Horkheimer and Adorno's negative dialectics, the new technical barbarism does not recognize difference in the over-application of rational measure, by establishing a baseline language into which all things can be translated and may be evaluated along a common continuum. This is analogous to the act of slipping between spheres of human activity on the basis of a common underlying code. What intrigues me today, however, is the way in which this pivot marks a noticeable fault line in Flusser's own project.

If the human is defined by the globe-spanning changes in technology, there seems to be a problem identifying both the human and the humanism. It is barbaric, Flusser explains, to explain to a starving street child in Brazil that "it has no beans because the national debt is several billions of dollars, this is an enlightened and enlightening explanation […] The new human is, however, would have to show that it is inhuman, barbarian, to speak like this to a child, because in this way inhuman orders of magnitude are introduced into the human relation to the child." (2002: 164).
If this is the case, what are we doing by defining discreet entities according to a global network of black boxes? Here, his 'nesting' metaphors seem to be at odds. In distinction to the black boxes, between the dolls there are troubling, imprecise grey zones that, at best, must be carefully navigated

by the new humanism and, at worst, cannot be crossed. Is this precisely a point in Flusser's own work seems in danger of switching sides into a new barbarism? Where crossing the abyss between the particular and the universal might be described as barbaric? I believe this is a structural danger endemic to Flusser's pairing of the historicization of technological epochs with a theory of humanism based on scale. This danger, I argue is part of the reason his humanistic endeavor remains unelaborated at the same time he insistently retains an entire complex of Enlightenment terms: primarily among them dignity, freedom, and rationality.

III: On The Enlightenment's Terms

Flusser writes that "Goethe, as is well known, recommends that man be 'noble, generous, and good,' thus showing how far we have left the enlightenment behind." He then proposes to update Goethe's quote for the current age. As alternatives for "noble" and "generous" he offers "Elegant" and "User-friendly" respectively. Yet he retains "Good," claiming that it is still appropriate, but should now be understood in context on an object's proper technical function (1999: 30). Theorists in agreement with Wolfe might consider the retention of this vocabulary to be a mark of vestigial humanist traits persisting within various permutations of a purportedly posthumanist thought that derive "directly from ideals of human perfectibility, rationality, and agency inherited from Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment" (Wolfe 2010: xiii). From this perspective these inheritances would need to be shed in order for a posthumanist subject to emerge. In Flusser's project, however, this gesture of updating, rather than discarding, is crucial. To translate some of Goethe's vocabulary into contemporary terms and retain other parts—rather than simply declaring his world dead and buried—points to a vastly different project.

In the Tschudin interview, Flusser expresses how he refuses to vote for political representatives, because he sees "it as beneath my dignity, and actually dirty, to have someone I hardly know make choices in my name" (2003: 97). This is perhaps strange, since, as we saw, this is indeed not a job for people "we hardly know," but rather for computers. If dignity is tied to choice-making, then we must then also speak of the dignity of machines. And we must speak of the dignity of the entire complex of machines in which operator and apparatus are indistinguishable. For this reason, dignity is also tied to scale: in "Humanizations," "Dog dignity" is identified by its position in the zoological hierarchy and human dignity the "position of the family man" (2002: 182). There are further, similar instances, but I believe the point is made. This is why the traditional humanism had to fail—because it

could only function within one order of magnitude, one in which the supreme dignity of humankind is the organizing principle: "Man is the measure of all things." Before the lens, this was easy for the ancients to say.

Central to his discussion of dignity is freedom, and here freedom of choice. Regarding this perhaps overdetermined word, he continues: "It is not at all clear what people mean when they speak of freedom. Do they mean that in spite of contingence, that they are to some degree not contingent? […] I strongly suspect that the word *freedom* is extraordinarily overrated. It is synonymous with *sin*. What was called sin in the Middle Ages came to be called freedom in the modern era, namely the possibility of opposing fate." (2003: 93)

Freedom, then, does not refer to a historical shift, a hard-won victory in a progressive struggle for human emancipation; it is a matter of nomenclature. Nomenclature is, however, crucial and at the heart of the questions we face. Not only as an explicit topic important to Flusser's own body of work (to which his intense interest in translation attests), but in the way this project functions. This shift in registers (from the religious to the political) tracks with the oft-described course of political theology. Flusser does not reject this, but migrates these terms into the arena of new technologies. Fate here should be understood as the program of the apparatus, which is why the critique of apparatuses represents an attempt to find the possibility of opposing this technologically-imposed destiny. When he uses the terms of the Enlightenment, they have already been (at least partially) recoded as something technological. What then does it mean for Flusser to center his analysis on concepts such as freedom or dignity but posit that their meanings are either opposite of accepted interpretations (humanism and barbarism) or simply "extraordinarily overrated?" This is, in fact, another way of asking the question: why talk of humanism when the conception of the human subject to which this term applies no longer seems to exist?

And here I return to the remark I put on hold: Flusser's claim that the extended process of humanization is "something we can't even imagine." Because human beings in their present form cannot conceptualize the next sages of human development, and (as "this" refers to the ongoing process as a whole) perhaps not even its present state, he must retain these terms in order to conceptualize the human at all. These terms are a manner of intellectual skeuomorphs, familiar forms to which we cling and which may lead us through their own manipulation and redefinition until, for example, husk of the familiar word "humanism" falls away. The world that it would usher in is not yet here, not yet clear—about this, Flusser is explicit. In *From Subject to Project*, he speculates on the probable vastly different physiology of the future man, concluding that when we compare ourselves "with the men of the future, one finds oneself before a tremendous abyss, wider and deeper than the one that

separated our fathers from chimpanzees or the one that separated our medieaval fathers from angels" (2002: 190). Separated both in terms of biological evolution and cosmic orders, we literally cannot even speak to them in their terms. New humanism lies precisely at the seams and cracks running throughout Flusser's works. Located at the inexplicable and unforeseeable gaps between orders of magnitude, black boxes, and *matrjoschka* dolls, this humanism lies outside of that for which Flusser's analyses can account—"for the moment, anyway." The new humanism is thus a *necessarily* unelaborated theory, or else only in terms inappropriate to it. How could it be otherwise?

To conclude, I would say the provocation for me is this: That here, after the enlightenment has turned against us, after Flusser diagnoses a world ruled by apparatuses and then his own solution threatens to turn barbaric, in the space where many other theories of media and technology have abandoned altogether the notion that the human and its dignity or order of magnitude is at all important, that here the call for a humanism exists at all. Unlike Kittler's famous call for the "Austreibung des Geistes aus den Geisteswissenschaften" (Kittler 1980), for Flusser, the human will not be driven from the humanities. The remarkable last lines of the essay "celebration," suggest that the role of the new technologies is to lead us back "through the strange detour through telematics to 'authentic' being human, which is to say, to celebratory existence for the other" (2002: 171). *A detour through*, it is as if we will be finished with and past the technologies that provoked and delineate his thinking. Flusser retains the belief that even as new technologies emerge to prompt further changes, however, something called the human—with "marrow and bone in the margin between 10^{-5} and 10^5 cm" will still remain. The retention of the word is necessary, even if we don't know what it is, because something threatens this subject of the process of humanization, and this is where for me Flusser's writings so wonderfully merge sophisticated theory and bare, *bloß*, and beaten-down life— threatens to destroy a starving child on the streets of São Paolo.

Again, Flusser's commitment to the human body distinguishes him and places him between the various posthumanisms and the beginnings of the digital humanities, which do not attempt to disavow the human body. Though perhaps digitized, "the human eye does not withdraw from the digital humanities," observe Leighton Evans and Sian Rees (2012: 31), and with this eye we arrive back at the lens and the role technology plays in rendering visible gray zones and gaps between disparate registers or systems.

Flusser's new humanism is thus indeed unimaginable; and it is futural. It is something nameless, in fact. I close with his final words on a new humanism, it must "refer to something nameless. It must circle it and beat around the bush" (2002: 164). The disjunction (or grey zone) that remains between the new world of apparatuses and the Enlightenment terminology he nonetheless retains in

fact maintains a wandering process, preserving a gap between the complete technologization of the human or vice versa. It leaves open the process whereby the human (or humanities) have the capacity to redefine the apparatus (or the digital), even as the former is conditioned by the latter. Not the deterministic *apparatus or human*, or, as is significant for the work being pursued at this conference, neither *digital or humanities*, but always the complex, always the digital humanities, which form a new lens through which to see this interpenetration.

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