Introduction I

With a Unique Gesture of Philosophizing: Vilém Flusser (1920-1991)

Silvia Wagnermaier

The following selection of texts[1] tries both to present Flusser's thinking and writing on art and to give an overview of the most important methodological and historical concepts characteristic for the broad variety of topics Flusser worked on.

Even if Flusser is continuously pointing out the importance of "epoche"[2] for philosophical thinking in general and is also practicing to obtain a position of distanced observation for himself, he does this only to get back to engaged writing, lecturing and teaching. As if methodologically repeating the horrifying experiences of his young life, when emigration and the loss of his entire family pulled him away from emotional attachments and threw him into "groundlessness" until he activated his political engagement as philosophical writer in São Paulo[3], Flusser unifies abstract analytical thinking with the concrete requirements of everyday life.

"A new imagination" is what Flusser, after all, hoped for. This essay introduces Flusser's conception of anthropological and technological development and describes the difference between traditional images – showing objects on two-dimensional surfaces – and technical images – computations of concepts.

Siegfried Zielinski's lecture on "Flusser's media philosophy" provides not only an explanation of these conceptions and an analysis of his methods in general but also contextualizes Flusser's importance for theorists and activists of (new) media and (new) media arts.

"Art and Politics" presents two different models of art. Flusser often uses models based on etymological or historical analysis and presents them in dialectical opposition.

The essays on Nancy Burson and Andreas Mueller-Pohle are examples of applied theory.

"Exile and Creativity" is – apart from geographic phenomena – pleading for a voluntary search for the improbable: leaving the habitual (e. g. subject position) in order to be able to realize or even create the formerly unperceivable[4]. This essay underlines Flusser's idea of "project" as a possibility to grow out of subjectedness.[5]

With his work on gestures, starting already in the midseventies, Flusser is attempting to step back from the proclaimed ongoing process of abstraction by concentrating his own philosophical work on the concreteness of the body and his movements, which have always been connected to mediation and abstractness.[6] Flusser is again and again creating a „point of

return", he is inventing model after model to accomplish areas of contact (interfaces) between the abstract and the concrete, science and humanities – never without an ethic dimension.[7] The creation of „Vampyroteuthis infernalis"[8] and his essays on a different „dermatology" are only but outstanding examples of what is characteristic for his work, reaching from extensions of science to excursions into fiction.

The selection of videoclips emphasizes moments of intervening thinking and boils down to the simple recognition, that dialogue is based on the acknowledgement of the other, not only due to the responsibility for the other/ neighbour but also the becoming aware of the limits of one's own competence.

Silvia Wagnermaier, Cologne, September 2004

[2] The influence of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology is relevant throughout Flusser's work.
[3] Cp. Vilém Flusser, *Bodenlos. Eine philosophische Biographie.* Mannheim: Bollmann, 1992 [4] Cp. Vilém Flusser, „Habit: The True Aesthetic Criterion", in: Andreas Ströhl (ed.), *Writings.* Minneapolis/ London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 42-50.
[5] Cp. Vilém Flusser, *Vom Subjekt zum Projekt. Menschwerdung.* Bensheim and Düsseldorf: Bollmann, 1994.
[6] Cp. also André Leroui-Gourhan, *Le Geste et la Parole.* Paris: Albin Michelle, 1964, also published in English as *Gesture and Speech* and works of Teilhard de Chardin.
[7] Cp. Dietmar Kamper, *Körper-Abstraktionen. Das anthropologische Viereck von Raum, Fläche, Linie und Punkt.* Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1999, here p.23.
[8] Vilém Flusser and Louis Bec, *Vampyroteuthis infernalis: Eine Abhandlung samt Befund des Institut Scientifique de Recherche Paranaturaliste.* Göttingen: Immatrix Publications, 1987.

Introduction II

Vilém Fluser: A brief introduction to his media philosophy

Siegfried Zielinski

Vilém Flusser is a thinker who became very valuable for the discourse on the interrelationship between culture and technologies, especially technologies of communication. But this was not at all the only field in which he was working. His thinking was extremely rich and of a great variety. He wrote and argued on cultural history, philosophy of language and of religion, as well as on cultural critique, design, architecture, political economy, or ethical issues.

But indeed, after *Pós História[1], post history,* which was published in 1983, his philosophy of photography and other technical media became a focus of his work and his international reputation. Most of his monographs between 1983 and 1991 were circling around the central issue of communication under the conditions of advanced electronic technologies, including the already classical apparatuses (cinema, video) and the digital computer.

How does the universe of technical images look like which he constructed in such a distinguished way?

I.

Let us address a meta-level: Why has Flusser become so fascinating especially for young academics/ intellectuals/ artists/ designers all over the world?

Let me try a three-fold answer:
- His theoretical and methodological approach to the sphere of communication technologies was not encoded hard/ deterministic. It was neither apocalyptical nor was it naive utopian. His thinking was soft encoded, which means porous, elastic, pluricular. He was conceptualizing the complexity of cultural processes in terms of strong interdependencies, **dialectical** – in the true sense of the word. In one of his last interviews, with the German writer Florian Rötzer, he formulated this in a typical rhetoric figure: "Indeed we are actively generating our tools and through them we are generating the world, but it is also true that those tools are hitting back on us and are generating us."[2]

- Flusser in principal and vehemently forwarded a relationship towards the world, which can be called *experimental*. For him technical media had been a pile, a treasure of possibilities (or perhaps better: ***potentialities***), which permanently had to be explored, every day and every day new. His general attitude can be described best by a quote from a novel, which Flusser admired. In the first volume of his epic novel, *The Man without Qualities*, Robert Musil wrote at the beginning of Chapter 4: "To get through open doors successfully, it is necessary to respect the fact that they have solid frames. This principle, by which the old professor had always lived, is simply a requisite of the sense of reality. However, if there is a sense of reality – and no one doubts its justification for existing – then there must also be something we might call a sense of possibility. Whoever has it, does not say, for example, this or that has happened, will happen, or must happen here; instead, they invent: this or that might, could, or ought to happen in this case. If they are told that something is the way it is, they think: Well, it could just as well be otherwise. Thus, the sense of possibility can be defined as the ability to conceive of everything there might be just as well and to attach no more importance to what is than to what is not."[3]

- Closely connected with that is his historical-philosophical concept, definitely and deeply rooted in his own biographical experience and the collective experience of the Jewish people. In his self-biography he wrote:
"Zukunft ist ein sich-Verwirklichen, Vergangenheit ein Unwirklich-Gewordensein."[4]
[Future is realizing yourself, whereas past is having become unreal.]

II.

To approach Flussers philosophy of media a bit more closely I would like to put something in the center of our attention, which he thematized again and again in his lectures and writings in different ways: his ***anthropology of cultural techniques***. Regarding the capacities of cultural expression one can differentiate between five steps/ jumps/ epochs in cultural history:
4 D: spatial/temporal orientation in the real world of moving things/ objects
3 D: Architecture, sculpture, monuments, artifacts
2 D: image, Bild
      + classical, pictorial (imaginative)
      + technical image (theoretical, conceptual)
1 D: linear text, writing with the alphanumeric code

0 D: the zero-dimension, pure numbers, algorithms.

Flusser was conceptualizing this anthropological development in a two-fold modality. He thought it *synchronously*, that is all those dimensions coexist in history with different distributions of power and effectiveness. And he constructed his anthropology diachronically as a process of reduction from perceiving the complexity of reality in four dimensions to the zero-dimension of the binary code.

But in each evolutionary step man did not only loose something. Each step also includes new capacities and qualities. This is especially true for the zero-dimension, where he clearly distinguishes from apocalyptic concepts, for which 0 is a teleological fleeing point. For Flusser this 0-dimension is a passage for building up a relationship or an attitude towards the world in which an important shift of paradigms takes place: from *subjectivity* to *projectivity*. Flusser liked to take single terms serious and often discussed them etymologically. The roots of *projection* for him led back to the Latin verb *proicere*, meaning to throw out, down, or forward and denoting a constructive action. It also has the meaning of projecting in the sense of shaping and changing the form of something. A projector is not only a machine that throws images, but also a planner or designer. In the early modern age, which was again and again an important implicit reference for Flusser, these connotative nuances were most strongly expressed in the experimental practices of the alchemists. The highest stage of transmutation from base matter to the converted precious and shining metal was called *proiectio*.

III.

The transformation processes Flusser was mostly interested in, where those from the object(ive) world to the binary code. Let us exemplariliy look closer on his arguments, step by step, referring to his lecture on the crisis of linearity[5], given at the Museum of Fine Arts, Bern, Switzerland, in March 1988.

1. From 4D/ 3D, the object (in movement) to the static image:
"You can hunt a pony more effectively, if you first make, produce an image of it"
(cave-painting).
To generate an image of something foremost is an act of creating a distance. You have to step back from the object, you need to push it away, in order to be able to see, paint or draw it. The image becomes an orientation (a plan) for future activity [Handeln], receives a pragmatic status. The chained, lined pictograms of hieroglyphic writing can be interpreted as a first logical step towards the linear text (loss of trust towards the images). On the other hand creating an image is a process of generating the world, but precisely a world of illusion/ Schein. As an

image "the world is not anymore an opposition/ resistance against which we strike, but it is becoming an appearance/ phenomenon [Erscheinung], which we look at".
The skill or capacity which corresponds with that is imagination/ phantasy, as a force to make something clear, evident, vivid [anschaulich]. The image is thrown form inside into the outside world and as such becoming a phenomenon of ***ex-sistence***.

2. Within the logic of modernity, of modern science, of modern art, this step is not sufficient for being able to formulate clear/ unequivocal rules for action. Images leave too much open space for interpretation. They constitute principally a magical relationship with the world. "Sie stellen sich vor die Gegenstände, anstatt sie vorzustellen." [They put themselves in front of the objects instead of showing/ introducing them to you.]

So with modernity we are moving towards a process of *transcoding* the surface down to the line with the help of phonetical signs and their organisation in rows of letters. Text is motivated and generated through the critique of images. For Flusser text and linearity are the same thing. With the alphabet and its linear organisation as text "the objective world is not perceived any longer as a fact/ facts of a case, but as a bunch of linear processes". The alphabetical critique of the images leads to something we learned to name ***historical consciousness***.

3. With the scientific jump or switch to the cultural technique of the binary code (from 1-D to 0-D) both are falling into a crisis: the linear text as well as our consciousness and concept of history. Flusser is thinking this as a process of punctualisation, "Zerbröselung"/ fractalization, atomization. "While letters are rolling up the surface of the image to lines, numbers are breaking those surfaces to points and intervals." Computation as thinking through numbers for him is "formal, completely abstract thinking" (furthest away form the objective world). "To process a code consisting of points and intervals one needs a kind of imagination/ phantasy, which never has existed before: "a programming imagination" (an imagination, which is able to program). To avoid misunderstandings, because Flusser was always speaking very enthusiastically about this kind of imagination, which he himself could only imagine within the traditional forms of imagination; he was not able to program (anything): With such a new kind of imagination he does not connect automatically something like a computed Nirvana. But he understands his arguments explicitly as a juxtaposition against cultural pessimism (Kulturpessimismus). Going through the zero-dimension we loose a lot, he says, almost anything which had been so valuable for us in the European tradition of enlightenment, of critical consciousness, nearly everything we are identifying with.

But potentially we win a lot, maybe even something we are not able to name yet. And

with the following he addresses (in 1989) the grandsons and granddaughters:
"Behind the keyboard, on which they hit, is a swarm of particles. And this swarm is a field of possibilities, which can be realized. With each hit of a key, one can press a form into the absurd chaos of this coincidence made of 0s and 1s, on can ***inform*** … One adventure after the other rises from chaos and appears on the screen, … an high speed, permanently changing and ***changeable***." The latter is very important for Flusser's anthropological concept. Here he suddenly becomes teleological (and his argument is very linear too): With the programming imagination (again as *Einbildungskraft* as a special mode of imagination) "people have reached the goal, which they were longing for right from the beginning: the digital code is the most perfect method to change the world however you like it (to hunt ponies perfectly)." Sometimes he would have added: Only the world which is projected, of course.

IV.

To characterize Flusser's philosophy of the media as cultural optimism is too flat. But unlike other contemporary philosophers, who were deeply affected by the violence of the historical context, he definitely he was not a cultural pessimist. After the ontological experience of Auschwitz nothing could get worse for him. After witnessing what human beings were able to do, Flusser believed in the possibility that machines might be able to do better, at least not to do worse. His philosophy of the media like his whole thinking is deeply rooted in an ethical concept of responsibility for the other and in dialogue with those, who are not identical with us. This concept is familiar to us through the writings of other Jewish philosophers like Martin Buber or Emanuel Levinas. Flusser expanded their ideas of responsibility by integrating a very specific concept of proximity. "The closer somebody is related to me – in space, time, thematically – the more responsibility I carry for him/ her and for myself. Flusser takes the risk and uses the religious term of "Nächstenliebe" *(loving the next)* to name this attitude.

In a truley paradoxical consequence and in a typical juxtaposition he was adding an additional semantical vibration to the pre-fix in "tele-matics" or "tele–communication", usually interpreted in the sense of creating a distance. Tele-matics, the combination of electronic communications over distances and connected machines and programmes for him are a possibility and a chance to bring the one and the other – divorced in reality - closer together through taking responsibility for the next, even if this next might live thousands of miles away and in a completely different cultural context. Though a pre-condition for building up such a new proximity with the help of technical instruments and systems for Flusser is that there is not a relation of ignorance, but a relation of *competence* for each other.

Recommended Readings:

Martin Buber, *I and Thou.* 1923.

Vilém Flusser, *Bodenlos. Eine philosophische Biographie.* Mannheim: Bollmann, 1992.Vilém Flusser, *Krise der Linearität.* Benteli, 1999.

(A complete bibliography of Flussers writings in chronological order as well as sorted by language can be found on http://flusser.khm.de)

Dietmar Kamper, *Körper-Abstraktionen. Das anthropologische Viereck von Raum, Fläche, Linie und Punkt.1st International Flusser Lecture.* Köln: Buchhandlung Walther König, 1999.

Emanuel Levinas, *Entre nous. Thinking-of-the-other.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Nils Röller und Silvia Wagnermaier (ed.), *Absolute Flusser*, Freiburg 2003.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, an annotated bibliography can be found at the Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/w/wittgens.htm

Siegfried Zielinski, *Audiovisions. Cinema and television as entr'actes in history.* Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 1999.

¹ Vilém Flusser, Pós História. Vinte instântaneos e um modo de usar. São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1983 und Nachgeschichte. Eine korrigierte Geschichtsschreibung. Bensheim und Düsseldorf: Bollmann, 1993.
² Vilém Flusser, „München, 1991. Gespräch mit Florian Rötzer". In: Zwiegespräche. Interviews 1967-1991. Ed. by Klaus Sander, Göttingen: European Photography, 1996, S. 225-242, for this quotation see p. 234.
³ Musil, The Man without Qualities, Reinbek: Rowohlt 1968(9) , p. 16.
⁴ Vilem Flusser, Bodenlos. Eine philosophische Autobiographie. Mannheim, Bollmann, 1992.
⁵ Vilém Flusser, Krise der Linearität. Bern: Benteli, 1988.

Session I

A new Imagination

Homo sapiens possesses the curious capacity to make pictures of the world. This may be observed on cave walls. Lately, another capacity is emerging: to make pictures of calculations. This may be observed on computer screens. Although both these capacities manifest themselves in the shape of pictures, they should be distinguished the one from the other. If not, we run the danger of missing what our cultural revolution is about. The purpose of this article is to help make such a distinction.

To make a picture of the world, on must step back from it. The question is: where to? It is easy to answer: from one place to some other. For instance: if one wants to make a picture of a pony – as they did in the Dordogne – one must step back from it and climb on a hill. But this is not the whole answer. We know from experience that it is not. When making a picture – when imagining – we step back from the world into ourselves. This is not really a place, it is a non-place. Imagination is our capacity to withdraw from the world to that non-place. (This is not an explanation, just a description, because how we do it is almost impossible to explain.) Thus, when making a picture, we no longer are within the world – we no longer in-sist – but we are outside the world – we ek-sist. We have become subjects to an objective world.

This is an uncomfortable situation. Because our arms are not long enough to bridge the abyss between ourselves and the world. We can no longer seize it and handle it. The world is no longer manifest. It has become apparent. It is no longer composed of objects against which we stumble. It is now composed of phenomena which we look at. Now why did we put ourselves into such an uncomfortable position? Into the position of doubt, of alienation? We did it, in order to see the world as a context. To see the forest, and no longer to have to stumble against individual trees. And what is the advantage of seeing contexts? One may step back into the world, and seize it and handle it better than before: in accordance with the context one saw. Imagination is a "réculer pour mieux sauter", and pictures are tables of orientation for seizing and handling the world better. (This is a contribution to art criticism.)

What has just been said may be contested. Are the wall paintings at Lascaux really nothing more than models for hunting? And what about pictures like those made by Maljévic: are they really models for sizing and handling the world? This article will not go into that quarrel. Its business is not to criticize pictures, but to distinguish between the imagination just described and the new one.

However, an additional remark seems to be in order. To imagine – to step back from the world into existence – is not sufficient for making pictures. One must somehow fix what one has seen – for instance on walls or canvasses – and one must somehow codify it, for it to become meaningful for others. In other words: one must feed one's imagination into a memory, and one must render it intersubjective. But those are technical problems concerning the production of pictures. Here the question is not about the production of pictures, but about two different forms of imagination.

The new imagination is the capacity to make pictures of calculations. Most of us do not have any experience with it. Therefore we cannot here operate with elegant concepts like "existence" and "subjectivity", as we did with the old imagination. In the absence of concrete experience those become meaningless terms. Instead, we must describe, what those people are doing who possess the new imagination. They sit facing an apparatus equipped with a keyboard and a screen, they press the keys and pictures appear on the screen. Where do they sit, and why are they doing this? Those are the same questions we asked of the old imagination. There, the answers were: people sit in "existence" – in subjectivity – and they do what they are doing – pictures – in order to seize and handle the world the better. People with common sense – reactionaries – will give the same answers in the case of the new imagination; because, for them, there is nothing really new under the sun. But the matter is not so simple.

The old imagination produces pictures of the world. But these are not clear and distinct models. They may lead to confused – magical – seizing and handling of the world; they must be clarified. For that purpose writing has been invented – some three thousand years ago. The purpose of writing is to explain – tell – pictures, to de-scribe them, and thus to permit orderly – correct – seizing and handling of the world. But writing itself is linear: it follows the order of the line. It has been found that such is not always the correct order to seize and handle the world. Linear orders like classical logic or causal explanations do not always properly describe the world. This is why – some three hundred years ago – the lines of writing have been cut into points and intervals: calculus was invented. The purpose of calculus is to permit a minutely exact seizure and handling of the world. One of the results of calculus are those apparatus the keys of which are pressed by those who possess the new imagination.

It thus appears that what we have here is a sort of loop: First, images produced by old imagination have been analyzed into lines by writing, then those lines have been analysed into points by calculus, and now these points are being re-synthetized into images by the new imagination. That loop has taken three thousand years to unfold, and it is, in fact, identical with Western civilisation. May it not be said that the people who possess the new imagination sit somewhere outside Western civilisation – so to say at the back of it – and that they are doing what they are doing in order to restore pre historical magic? Those cannot be the correct answers to our question. The matter must be examined further.

The first picture to be synthetized from points – the first grainy picture – is the photo. It is true, that under the calculating gaze all previous pictures – like all the objects in the world – are seen to be grainy: composed of molecules, atoms, and even smaller point-like bits. But photos are the first pictures which have come about by deliberately assembling point-like bits, by computing. This is why photos are the first manifestations of the new imagination, and they must be taken as the point of departure for our examination.

The grains of which a photo consists – molecules of silver compounds – are too small to be assembled by fingers. This is why apparatuses must be invented to do this. Those apparatuses are programmed in such a way that they capture rays with the molecules, and then compute them into pictures. They can do so automatically, without any further human intervention. (Of course, photographers may press the releaser, but they are nothing but unnecessary substitutes for automatic releasers.) What is the purpose of all this? This is a question which should not be asked of the early camera inventors (and even less of the photographers): they did not know, then, what they are doing. It is only now that we possess synthetic computer images that we can answer that question. Very characteristically, the computer should not be taken as a consequence of the camera – it should not be explained causally – but on the contrary: the camera should be taken as a primitive computer (it should be explained prospectively.

It now appears that cameras were invented in order to emancipate imagination from the necessity to make pictures, and to render it free for the programming of automatically produced pictures. This new imagination programs an apparatus and then waits until an enormous amount of pictures is vomited by the apparatus. Some of the pictures thus produced will surprise the programmer: they have not been expected. Those are "informative" pictures, improbable pictures. Imagination withdraws from picture making into apparatus programming, in order to become more powerful, more informative. It can now imagine the improbable, the unexpected.

But this is not the whole truth about the new imagination. As imagination withdraws from picture making into programming, it somehow reverses itself. And the pictures which result from it point to the opposite direction of those produced by the old imagination. This is difficult but necessary to understand. The old imagination withdraws from the world into an un-place where it produces pictures. It is thus a motion of abstraction: it abstracts from the world the two dimensions of the picture surface. The new imagination advances from the points of the calculus towards an apparatus which produces pictures. It is thus a motion of concretion: it projects from the zero-dimensional points into the two dimensions of the picture surface. This is why the old and the new pictures point to opposite directions:

The old pictures are tables of orientation within the world: they point at the world, they show it, they mean it. The new ones are projections of calculating thought: they point at thought, they show it, they mean it. Now thought itself does not mean the world as it is, but as it could be. For example: a synthetic picture of an aeroplane does not show a "real", but a possible "aeroplane". It is the representation of a "thought" plane. The same is true of a photo, a film or a video, but there it is less obvious than in the synthetized picture.

Thus thanks to the new imagination we no longer face the world as its underlings – as subjects – but we now possess the faculty to calculate it as a field of virtualities, and to compute some of those virtualities into simulations of realities according to our own program. This is the new imagination. The consequence is that we no longer seize and handle the world in order to change the real, but that we do so in order to realize virtualities. We are no longer sub-jects, but pro-jects. Our head turns if we try to execute such an existential revolution.

This article has attempted to show the difference between the old an the new imagination. Thus: thanks to the old imagination we can, inexplicably, withdraw from the world into existence, perceive its context, and we can then seize and handle the world better; and thanks to the new imagination we can advance from total abstraction into fields of virtualities, and there compute simulations of real worlds. Now this seems to be a rather elaborate formulation. It is not. He who is committed to the production of old and new pictures experiences it concretely. And this explains the curious creative dizziness which takes hold of those who program synthetic pictures, who possess the new imagination. With each key they press they dive into a field of virtualities, and entire worlds emerge which they themselves had not expected. A new level of existence is opening up, with new experiences, sentiments, emotions; concepts and values proper to it. Homo sapiens is about to bring a faculty into play which so far has been dormant.

The text used here differs hardly form the version published in Artforum, April 1988, vol. 26, pp. 14-5 which was part of a series of five texts that Flusser wrote from January 1987 to June 1988 for Artforum entitled "Curie's Children. Vilém Flusser on Discovery". Artforum published twenty texts by Flusser. Another English version of the text can be found in Vilém Flusser, Writings, which was edited by Andreas Ströhl and uses in case there are no English texts by Flusser himself translations by Erik Eisel. (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) [http://www.upress.umn.edu/Books/F/flusser_writings.html]

A German version entitled "Eine neue Einbildungskraft" can be found in: Volker Bohn (ed.), Bildlichkeit. Frankfurt 1990, S. 115-28, republished in a slightly shortend version in the Flusser-Reader: Stefan Bollmann (ed.), Die Revolution der Bilder, Mannheim 1995.

Session II
Art and politics

The artist is somebody who does something to be exhibited in public, and the same goes for the politician. Indeed: Platon took the words "art" and "politics" to be two names for the same thing. The question is: why do we no longer quiet share his opinion? (Although some of us may agree with him that politics is an art.) Here is the preliminary answer: we do no longer despise art just as much as he did.

The reason why Platon held art and politics in contempt was not the fact that both of them exhibit: as far as we know he had no objection to prostitution. The reason was that both art and politics attempt to impose ideas, (art upon objects and politics upon people). He held that if you impose an idea, you have to adapt it to what you impose it on: to objects and people. By doing so, you betray the idea. For instance: if you draw a triangle on sand, you will find that the sum of its angles is no longer exactly 180°, and if you impose an ideal state upon people, you will find that it is no longer ideal. To find this out, you only have to look at the idea before it was imposed, and compare it with what the artist and the politician have done to it. The look at ideas, and the look at mishandled ideas shows wrong ideas, and this is called "opinion". Platon holds art and politics in contempt, because they lead to opinions, which is the opposite of wisdom. The lover of wisdom, (the "philosopher"), is the only critic of art and politics, (which are the same thing called by two different names), because he is the only one to have access to true ideas.

Consider how the critic goes about his business: There is a market place surrounded by houses. Inside the houses are people who handle ideas to impose them upon something, (for instance they handle the idea of a pot and impose it on clay, or the idea of a shoe and impose it on leather). When they have finished doing this, they take their "work" and put it in front of their door: the exhibit it. They do so, because they want to exchange it for some other "work", for instance, the pot for the shoe. If you permit the pun: the market place becomes an "art forum". The problem this poses is: which are the criteria that govern the exchange of the pot for the shoe, (which state how much the pot is worth, what is his value?) And the answer is: he who sees the ideal pot, (and the ideal shoe), knows its true value. Therefore the

critic, (the philosopher), walks up and down the market place, (the "art forum"), he compares the works exhibited there to the ideas seen in theory, and he fixes their values. That is to say: the philosopher governs the market place, (he is the "king" of the city). (Of course: what goes for pots and shoes goes for any other political opinion.)

The artists and politicians submit their opinions to the judgement of the philosophers, (like it or not), because they have no better criteria, and they do not want to fight each other. Take the medieval town for example: it is surrounded by walls which open their gates every day of the week except Sunday to let in the fruits of the surrounding fields, for instance eggs and flour. Those products of "economy" are exhibited on the market place on one of its sides, and the "works of art", (pots and shoes), are exhibited on the other. Then the philosopher, (the bishop), steps out from his cathedral, walks down the market place, and he fixes the true price of exchange, the "praecium iustum". His is the only authoritized critic, (the king of the city), and if his authority is contested, there will be war between the town and the fields, and between the various streets in to which the trades are separated. Thus art criticism is a question of life and death, and he who opposes his opinion to the theoretical, (authorized), critic will be publicly burned. This is accepted "catholically", (by everybody).

However, in the course of the 14th and 15th century, the artists, (artisans), rebelled against the philosophers, and they deposed them. The reasons why they did so are complicated, but they may be stated simply: the philosophers disagreed between them as to how true the ideas are to be looked at. One school of thought, (the "realists"), stated that the ideas may be discovered through logic, and the other school, (the "nominalists"), affirmed that the ideas reveal themselves to faith alone, ("sola fide"). Now if the authorities quarrel thus, their criteria can no longer be taken as valid. The artisans stepped in, and they took over the government of the city. Politics took over, and submitted theory to its purpose. The artisan does not share the theoretical view that he is betraying ideas. He holds, on the contrary, that he is inventing ever better ideas, ideas that may be progressively improved upon, as they are being imposed upon various objects and people. He holds that ideas are models which may be modernized , and that the purpose of theory is to supply the artisans with ever better models. The result of this revolution, (this submission of theory work), is modern science and technology which leads to the Industrial revolution.

Now consider what this did to the philosophers, (now better called "intellectuals"). They were expelled from government, and enclosed into ghettos where they were fed by the politicians, so that they might elaborate models. The politicians divide them into two classes: one was to produce models which are useful for working, (scientists, technicians, proposers of

ever better models), and the other was to produce models which amuse the politicians when they are not working, ("artists" in the modern sense of that term). This modern division of our culture into a "hard" one and a "soft" one. And the ghetto was divided into two quarters: universities and similar institutes for the servants, academies and similar institutes for the clowns to live in. However, the ghetto posed a problem to the artisans who now governed the city: what can be done to prevent the intellectuals from sneaking out of it, and from meddling with politics, (the government of the city)? From biting the hand that feeds them?

The solution was to surround the ghetto with a glorified aura, to give the intellectuals a "social status". The "great scientist" who is child-like where exposed to the world, and the "great artist" who lives in splendid isolation. But this did not prove to be a perfect solution. The useful intellectuals, (the scientists), kept believing that what they were after were "true ideas", and not only models for a progressively improving industrial production. And the useless intellectuals, (the artists), kept believing that what they were after were models for new experiences, ("aistehsthai"=to experience), and not only wall decorations. Now this was a danger: the scientists may come up with models which render the politicians useless, (in an industrial production and in the government of the city), and the artists may come up with models which show that work is not the only source of value, and that therefore the artisan, (the industrialist), is not necessarily the best king of the city. In short: there was a counter-revolutionary climate within the ghetto, and the intellectuals, (the philosophers), never really accepted their submission to the artisans, (the politicians).

The markable thing about this is that the artists in the modern sense of that term, (the clowns), were now opposed to the artists in the classical sense of that term, (the artisans become industrialists and politicians). This becomes quite obvious just after the Industrial revolution, when the Romantic artists, who are the sons of industrialists, advocate the abolition of industry, (of the fathers who feed them). Somewhat later, the artists prefer to die of tuberculosis in the mansards of the industrial towns to submitting their clownship. This is remarkable because are not the artists doing exactly the same thing the industrialists and politicians do, namely imposing their ideas upon objects? What, after all, is the "ontological" difference between a plastic fountain pen, and a painting or a musical composition? Are not both the results of a "political" opinion?

Take the plastic fountain pen as an example for this troubling problem. There is a machine which is an instrument built according to models proposed by useful intellectuals, (by scientists and technicians). There is a plastic material which is fed into the machine from outside. There is a tool which was inscribed with the shape, (the "idea"), of a fountain pen,

and that tool was made by a tool maker which we cannot help to call an artist. The machine presses the tool against the plastic material, (it "works"), and out come plastic fountain pens, one almost exactly like the others. Now, according to the governing politicians the "value" of those pens flows from the "work", (from the machine which they own, and into which they have invested the results of their previous efforts). But according to the tool maker, (the artist), the value of the fountain pen is not to be found in the work which produced them, (nor in the plastic material), but in their shape: they are worth whatever they are worth because or their fountain-pen shape, of their idea. And it is therefore not the politician, but the philosopher, (the one that sees the idea), who should criticize them.

This is indeed a curious situation: the moment the artist becomes king, (transforming himself into an industrialist), he gives rise to a new type of artist, whom he considers to be his clown, but who denies his right to judge him, and who submits, by his own free will, to theoretical, philosophical criticism. Of course: this sounds very funny, but it is one of the crucial aspects of the present situation.

Work, in the present situation, has become divided into two different gestures: a "soft" one, and a "hard" one. The soft gesture handles symbols in a way which results in the elaboration of models, and the hard gesture imposes those models upon matter. The soft gesture is executed by people whom we must call "artists", and who are equipped with computers and similar apparatuses. The hard gesture is executed by machines which are becoming rapidly automated. In this transformation of work there are several aspects which strike us. The first one is that the actual imposition of a form upon material, ("work" in the strict sense), has become a mechanical, no longer a human, gesture. The second aspect is that those people who handle symbols to make models with them, (the "programmers of the machine", the "software people"), although they are "artists", (because they hand in "ideas"), are also "philosophers", (because they do not apply those "ideas"). And the third aspect is that there is no longer much sense in wanting to classify those people into useful and amusing ones, into servants and clowns, because the models they elaborate are both "scientific and technical", (they may be applied to work), and also "artistic" (they are meant to be pleasant). In other words: the present situation can no longer be analyzed either by Platon or by politicians.

Not by Platon, because all of a sudden here we have people who contemplate forms, (who live in "theory"), but who handle those forms while looking at them, (on a computer screen, for example). Those people are artists become philosophers or philosophers become artists.

And not by politicians, because all of a sudden here we have people who program work, (who "govern" it), without necessarily owning any machines, and without having left their ghetto. To put this in other terms: all of a sudden here we have people who prove that "theory" and "art" may fuse, and that "art" and "politics" may mean two different ways of life altogether.

It sounded funny, a few paragraphs earlier, when it was said that the artist become king submits, by his own free will, to theoretical criticism. It no longer sounds so funny. It now means that the artist-king submits his models to his own theoretical criticism, before he feeds them into machines which automatically transcode them into hard matter. It now means, in other words, that art criticism no longer steps in after the work is done, but now is part and parcel of the work's project, (its program). There is no longer any sense in wanting to criticize works: they have already been criticized, before they began to be executed.

This is the situation as it emerges: artists, (people who handle forms with a view to applying them), govern the city. They are called "system analysts", "futurologists", "technocrats", "media people" and so forth. They do not govern the city. They do not govern the city by applying their models directly, but by programming machines, (and other people), to do so. In this sense they are "philosophers": they contemplate the forms, they have a theoretical vision. Politicians may not yet be aware of it, but they have become automates programmed by those "philosopher-artists". This is the reason why we can no longer agree with Platon when he puts art and politics in the same bag: politics have been disposed, and art governs the city.

Session III

On Nancy Burson: Chimeras

A revolutionary new mentality is about to emerge: we shatter the world to bits, and then remould it nearer to the heart's desire. (Rubyat, Omar Khayyam). To put it less poetically: we calculate the world, and then we compute it. Nancy Burson's pictures are products of that new mentality. And they also show it: they show what sort of world will result form that mentality: a world of chimeras.

The heart desires something: for instance an androgynous human being, or an accomplished Big Brother, or a perfect female beauty. In order to realize such a program in a form of an image, various available photos should be chosen. In the first case the photos of six women and six men, in the second case the photos of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Mao and Khomeiny, in the third case the photos of Bette Davies, Audrey Heburn, Grace Kelly, Sophia Loren and Marilyn Monroe. (http://www.nancyburson.com/human_fr.html, page one, first composite) Each of those photos is to be calculated: dissected into very small squares called "pixels". Those calculations are fed into a computer, which is to be instructed to compute the desired image from those pixels according to the program. The result will be Bursons's photos of chimeras.

"Chimera" is an ancient word, and it means a composite fabulous beast: a goat with a lion's head and a tail of serpents. One might thus be lead to believe that the mythical Ancients knew how to calculate and to compute, but one would be mistaken. The mythical chimera was a collage, a patchwork. If Bellerophon (http://homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML/Bellerophon.html), who fought it heroically, had kicked it, (instead of fighting it heroically), its head would have rolled on one side, its tail on the other. This is quite different with the newly emerging, "true" chimeras. You may kick Burson's Big Brother (http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/big-brother/) as long as you like, he will never disintegrate into Hitler, Mussolini and so forth. And if you take a "geep", (a chimera computed from a goat and a sheep), and if you kick it, it will blabber, (or whatever is the appropriate geep sound). The new, "true" chimeras are consistent, autonomous phenomena. This is the way with myth: as soon as they become real, they look differently from what was expected of them.

The new chimerical mentality manifests itself predominantly in two tendencies: the "telematic" one and the "biotechnical" one. The first tendency dissects the world into information bits, and it computes new, chimerical information from this. The other tendency dissects living organisms into information bits called "genes", and it computes new, chimerical organisms form this. Burson's pictures are examples for the first tendency, the "geep" is an example for the second one. If one feels like it, one may call the first tendency "art", and the second one "science". But both those tendencies converge, and they will merge in the future.

The great pedagogical advantage of Burson's pictures is that they show how such merger will come about. There is for instance the picture "Lion/Lamb" (http://www.robertwilson.com/watermill/04auctionBottom.htm) which is the image of a chimera which was computed out of pixels of a picture of a lion and a lamb. All that is necessary is to transcode this pixels into genes, and the creature will soon graze on our meadows and devour our cattle. And then there is the picture "Chimpanzee and Man" (http://www.nyu.edu/greyart/exhibits/burson/images/photos1/photo1e/body_photo1e.html), which proposes itself as a model for future genetic manipulations. But the most impressive of all is, form this point of view, the picture "Mankind", (http://www.nancyburson.com/human_fr.html, picture 3), which, basing itself on population statistics, shows the chimera of a man who is 57% oriental, 7% black and 36% white. Is this not indeed a prolegomena for every future eugenics? The cold terror which seizes us when we look at those pictures is due to the fact, that they are not only representations of the new mentality, but at the same time models for every future, (and not necessarily merely genetic), computation.

But it is possible to receive Burson's pedagogical message from a different angle. Those pictures show what will result if you dissect already available information, and if you assemble it anew, (no matter whether the information is calculated into pixels, genes, or however). Nothing new will result from it, but only old information, albeit in chimerical form. Those pictures would be truly creative only if some as yet unavailable information, some "noise", had been introduced into the computation. The pictures say, (as if in negative), that calculation and computation will result in something truly new only if imagination, (fantasy, inspiration, or however you want to call this), is added to it. Burson's pictures are pedagogically valuable precisely because they show that unimaginative calculation and computation will not result in what the heart desires, namely in a world that is not such as it now is, but that is such as it ought to be.

Everything that has been computed from calculations is a chimera. Burson's pictures show this. Such "true" chimeras can never again be decomposed. The things that result and that

will result from the new mentality can never again be unmade. But Burson's pictures show somewhat else too: they show, (as if in negative), what is essential if the emerging chimerical world is to open new horizons for us and our children. The new mentality must not be permitted to enclose itself into calculation and computation, but it must open itself toward imagination, (toward adventure). If one looks at Burson's pictures in this spirit, hope is again possible: Burson's chimeras will be followed by other chimeras which will be open toward adventure, and we, ourselves, will become such chimeras which open themselves toward that which has never yet existed.

Session IV

Exile and Creativity

This Essay will explore neither the existential nor the religious connotations of the concept of the term exile. However, we should keep in the back of our mind the Christian story of man's expulsion from Paradise and his entrance into the world, the Jewish mystic story of the exile of divine spirit in the world, and the existential story of man as a stranger in the world. All of these stories should be kept in the back of our mind without being verbalized. For the intention here is to interpret the exile situation as a challenge to creative activity.

This is the proposed hypothesis: The expelled has been torn out of his customary surroundings (or else he has done it himself). Habit is a blanket that covers up the facts of the case. In familiar surroundings, change is recongnized, but not permanence. Whoever lives in a home finds change informative but considers permanence redundant. In it, the lack of redundancy does not allow the flood of information to be received as meaningful messages. Because it is unusual, exile is unliveable. One must transform the information whizzing around into meaningful messages, to make it liveable. One must "process" the data. It is a question of survival: if one fails to transform the data, one is engulfed by the waves of exile. Data transformation is a synonym for creation. The expelled must be creative if he does not want to go to the dogs.

Before I begin defending this hypothesis, I want to point out that it proposes a positive assessment of expulsion. In a situation where one is accustomed to pitying the expelled, this positive assessment is itself unusual, and, according to the hypothesis, it should itself be informative. For it seems – according to this hypothesis – that those people who want to "help" the expelled to become ordinary again are, in fact, engaged in reeling him back into their ordinariness. This is an informative assumption, because it forces us to think about what is usual. The assumption does not justify the expellers, but rather, it exposes the vulgarity or the expellers: the expelled were bothersome factors who were expelled to make the surroundings even more ordinary than before. Indeed, this assumption leaves the following question to our discretion: Even without intending to do so, have the expellers not done the expelled a service?

I use the word expelled rather than refugees or emigrants, to bring the totality of the problem before our eyes. For I do not only refer to phenomena like the "boat people", Palestinians, or Jewish emigration from Hitler's Europe, but also, the expulsion of an older generation form the world of their children and grandchildren – or even the expulsion of humanists from the world of apparatuses. We find ourselves in a period of expulsion. If one values this situation positively, the future will appear a little less dark.

This essay has been written by one who has been expelled not only many times, but also in a number of different ways. Thus, it comes from one who knows the suffering that characterizes every form of exile. Also, the shadow that this sort of suffering casts and for which the German language has coined the term Heimweh ("homesickness"). Nevertheless or perhaps out of spite – this essay will praise expulsion.

Habit is like a cotton blanket. It covers up all the sharp edges, and it dampens all noises. It is unaesthetic (from aisthesthai = perception), because it prevents bits of information form being perceived, as edges or noises. Because habit screens perceptions, because it anaesthitizes, it is considered comfortable. As comfy. Habit makes everything nice and quiet. Every comfortable surrounding is pretty, and this prettiness is one of the sources of love of the fatherland. (Which, indeed, confuses prettiness with beauty.) If the cotton blanket of habit is pulled back, one discovers things. Everything becomes unusual, monstrous, in the true sense of the word un-settling. To understand this, it is quite enough to look at one's right hand with all its finger movements from the perspective of a Martian: an octopus-like monstrosity. The Greeks called this "discovering" of the covered up *aletheia*, a word that we translate as "truth".

It is not as if we could actually be expelled form our right hand, unless of course, we let it be amputated. Thus, when we discover how monstrous our bodily condition is, it is owing to our strange ability to expel our bodies from our thoughts. An exile as radical as this cannot be maintained for long: we are overcome with irresistible homesickness for our own beautiful bodies, and we reimmigrate. Yet, this example of an extreme form of exile is instructive: For the expelled, it is almost as if he has been expelled from his own body. As if he was out of his mind. Even the usual things that he takes into exile are creepy. Everything around him and in him becomes sharp and noisy. He is driven to discover the truth.

The transcendence in which the expelled *finds* himself (as much as the world finds describes him, for in reality he is really lost) causes everything around him and in him to appear provisory, transitory. In habit, only change is perceived; in exile, everything is perceived as if in the process of change. For the expelled, everything challenges him to change his life. In

exile, where the blanket of habit has been pulled back, he becomes a revolutionary, if only because it enables him to live there. Thus, the suspicion that confronts the expelled in his New Land is completely justified. His advent in the New Land breaks through the usual that threatens his prettiness.

Only for the expelled is the New Land truly new. Wherever he is driven, he discovers America. For the natives who must accept him, it is Old Land. Only the immigrant in America is truly an American, even if he should migrate to ancient lands (for example Jerusalem). His immigration into exile radiates an American atmosphere. Yet, from his perspective, it is something completely different: he is concerned with making the unusual liveable (that is, everything). It is possible to shape a creative dialogue between the expelled and the native out of this reciprocal misunderstanding.

It is not inconsequential where one is driven. Certainly, for the expelled himself, all exile is New Land. But, for the original natives, every land has its own character, that is, other habits that cover up the truth. There are lands that consider themselves new out of habit (for example America or the land of our grandchildren or the land of automatic apparatuses). Also, there are lands that consider themselves old out of habit, which is to say "sacred" (for example, Jerusalem or the land of linear texts or the land of bourgeois values). If the expelled moves into a land that considers itself sacred, the original natives are forced to uncover their sacredness as habit. On the one hand, he forces the Americans, the grandchildren, and the apparatus functionaries to uncover themselves as something that has always existed. On the other hand, he forces the citizens of Jerusalem, the authors, and the defenders of eternal values to uncover themselves as lazy creatures of habit. In this manner, the creative dialogue between the expelled and the original natives can be divided into two types. The one type (such as the dialogue between an expelled and a New Yorker) will bring renewal through information; the other type (that between an expelled and a citizen of Jerusalem) will bring desacralization through information. This classification is important for an understanding of the present (such as the phenomenon of so-called guest workers or the phenomenon of the critique of the apparatuses, as has been advanced in Germany by the Greens).

The expelled are uprooted people who attempt to uproot everything around themselves, to establish roots. They do it spontaneously, simply because they where expelled. It is an almost vegetable process. Perhaps one can observe it when one tries to transplant treew. It can happen that the expelled becomes conscious of the vegetable, almost vegetative aspect of his exile; that he discovers that the human being is not a tree; and that perhaps human dignity consists in not having roots – that a man first becomes a human being when he hacks off the

vegetable roots that bind him. In Germany, there is the hateful word *Luftmensch*, a careless "man with his head in the air". The expelled may discover that *air* and *spirit* are closely related terms and that therefore *Luftmensch* essentially signifies human being.

This sort of discovery is a dialectical change in the relationship between expelled and expeller. Before this discovery, the expeller is the active pole and the expelled is the passive pole. After this discovery, the expeller is the victim and the expelled is the perpetrator. This is the discovery that history is made by the expelled, not by the expellers. The Jews are not part of Nazi history; the Nazis are part of Jewish history. The grandparents are not part of our biography; the grandchildren are part of our biography. We are not part of the history of the automatic apparatuses; the apparatuses are part of our history. And, more radically, the Nazis, the grandchildren, and the apparatuses have driven us into exile, the more we make history: the better we transcend. But this is not the decisive part of the discovery that we are not trees – that the uprooted make history. Instead, the decisive part is to discover how tiresome it is not to establish new roots. After all, habit is not merely a cotton blanket that covers up everything. It is also a mud bath where it is nice to wallow. Homesickness is a *nostalgie de la boue*, and one can make oneself comfortable anywhere, even in exile. *Ubi bene, ibi patria.* The discovery that we are not trees challenges the expelled to struggle constantly against the seduction pleasures of the mud bath. To continue to experience expulsion, which is to say: to allow oneself to be expelled again and again.

Of course, this leads us to the question of freedom. The discovery of human dignity as uprootedness seems to reduce one's freedom to the mere right to come and go as one pleases. The right of the spirit to drift form one place to another. But, in reality the question of freedom leads us to the question: Is it possible to allow oneself to want to be driven? Is there not a contradiction between "allowing" and "wanting"? Are we able to want our fate? A famous question. But, for the expelled, it is not a theoretical question, such as the dialectic between determination and freedom; rather it is a practical question. The first expulsion was suffered. It has shown itself to be productive. Afterwards, exile becomes habit. Should one, like Baron von Münchhausen, try to pull oneself out of this habit by one's own bootstraps, or should one provoke an new expulsion? Thus, the question of freedom is not the question of coming and going, but rather of remaining a stranger. Different from others.

At the beginning, I said that creating is synonymous with data processing. By that I meant that the production of new information (creating) depends on the synthesis of previous information. Such a synthesis consists in the exchange of information, just as it might be stored in one singular memory or in multiple memories. Thus, with respect to creating, one can speak

of a dialectical process where the dialogue is either "internal" or "external". The advent of the expelled in exile leads to "external" dialogs. This spontaneously causes an industrious creative activity in the vicinity of the expelled. He is a catalyst for the synthesis of new information. If, however, he becomes aware of this uprootedness as his dignity, then an "internal" dialogue begins with himself; which is to say an exchange between the information he has brought with him, and an entire ocean with waves of information that toss around him in exile. The objective is the creation of meaning between the imported information and the chaos that surrounds him. If these "external" and "internal" dialogues are harmonized with each other, they transform in a creative manner not only the world, but also the original natives and the expelled. This is what I meant when I said what freedom means for the expelled: the freedom to remain a stranger, different from the others. It is the freedom to change oneself and others as well.

The expelled is the Other of others. Which is to say, he is other for the others, and the others are other for him. He himself is nothing more than the Others of him. In this manner, he is able to "identify". His advent in exile allows the original natives to uncover that they are unable to "identify" without him. Because of this advent in exile, the "self" is rent asunder, opening it up to others, to a being-with-others. This dialogic atmosphere that characterizes exile is not necessarily part of a mutual recognition, but rather, it is mostly polemical (not to mention murderous). For the expelled threatens the "particular nature" of the original natives; this strangeness calls him into question. But, even such a polemical dialogue is creative; for it leads to the synthesis of new information. Exile, no matter what form it takes, is a breeding ground for creative activity, for the new.

Being expelled means being forced to become other, and to be other than the others. Therefore this is not only about a geographic phenomenon: one is somewhere else after the expellation. This is also about a phenomenon of freedom: one is forced to be creative. In this sense the equation expellation=creation may be turned around: Not only is every expelled forced to be creative, but also everyone who is creative sees himself forced to be expelled. This turnaround of the equation, with a question mark set, is the motivation

Session V

ON ANDREAS MÜLLER-POHLE'S PHOTOGRAPHIES

What I don't see, I photograph. What I don't photograph, I see.

They are the result of a theoretical reflection. Müller-Pohle's theory of photography, as expressed in various of his writings and lectures, needs to be stated, before the pictures themselves are to be considered. There is nothing empirical, naïve, about them, and if they seem to be the results of spontaneous motions, this is due to disciplined deliberation. The theory which sustains the photos may be resumed this way:

The camera is an apparatus which was programmed to make pictures. The photographer is expected to act within that program. If he does so, he will be making pictures of the outside world. That world reflects rays which the camera captures on sensitive surfaces, and the photographer who acts within the camera program will "document" the outside world as captured by the camera. But the photographer may refuse to act within the camera program. He may transfer his interest from the outside world toward the camera interior. He may concentrate upon what happens to the rays which come into the camera from the outside world. The pictures which such a photographer will produce will no longer "document" the outside world, but rather the camera program. They will thus whiten the black box. Such pictures are important, because the camera program which they show is one among the many apparatus programs which are about to structure our perceptions, desires, feelings, our knowledges and our actions. In fact: such a photographer who refuses to go by the camera program is committed to showing the hidden programs of the emerging society of automatic apparatus.

In his book Transformance Andreas Müller-Pohle presents the result of such an effort to photograph the inside of the camera, instead of photographing the outside world. His strategy to escape form the camera program is deceptively simple. The camera prescribes a specific sequence of gestures for the photographer to execute: (1) take hold of the camera. (2) look through it toward the outside world. (3) choose one among the visions you have seen. (4) press upon the releaser. Müller-Pohle inverts this sequence thus: (1) take hold of the camera. (2) press upon the releaser. (3) look at the picture that results. (4) choose one. What happens through this inversion is a true revolution of photographic vision. The outside world disap-

pears from it. The freedom of choice is transferred from the decision to press upon the releaser toward the decision to select one among numerous pictures taken by chance. This freedom is exercised, not within the camera program, but after the camera function, and it acts upon the automatically produced pictures. And the criteria of choice are no longer imposed by the dubious relation between the picture and the outside world, but have become purely formal (aesthetic).

If one looks upon the photos presented, one is impressed by their elegance and their "abstractness". The elegance is due to the photographers criteria of choice: he has selected the photos from among a multitude of automatically produced pictures. Their "abstractness" is due to our difficulty to establish a link between them and the objects of the outside world: since the photos were taken blindly, they do not show the photographer's vision of the outside world, but they show, what the moving camera does to the rays it captures. However, this elegance and abstractness of the photos should not divert the observer's attention from the basic message they carry. Which is this: It is possible to escape from the camera program. Left to itself, the camera will photograph blindly, by pure chance, absurdly, without any purpose. And man can then step in, and he can give a meaning to this absurd automatic function, by exercising his freedom of choice. Thus man may use chance as a strategy for freedom.

This is an important message. It goes far beyond the realm of photography, and it concerns a possible attitude in the face of every automatic apparatus. It suggests that freedom, in the immediate future, may not demand from us that we fight the apparatus, but that we let it function blindly, and then choose from what the apparatus has produced. Andreas Müller-Pohle's photos say this, in effect: Do not photograph as you are supposed to, but let the camera do it. You will then be free to select the pictures you prefer according to the criteria which are yours, and not those imposed by the camera program. Andreas Müller-Pohle's photos are proclamations for the freedom in the face of the automatic apparatus.

Session VI
The Gesture of Making*

The symmetry between our hands is such that we would have to turn our left hand in a fourth dimension, if we wanted it to coincide with our right hand. Since such a fourth dimension is practically inaccessible, ("practically" meaning of course: handily), our two hands can never coincide, and are condemned to mirror each other forever. We may, of course, "imagine" their coincidence, for instance by complex manipulations of gloves or through film tricks. But if we imagine such a thing, we become dizzy. A giddiness takes hold of us which is not dissimilar to what is called the "philosophical vertigo". The reason is that the symmetrical opposition of our two hands is an important aspect of the human condition, and if we were able to overcome it, even if only through imagination, we would have overcome our condition. Still: in a different sense we do try to overcome it. We do try to make our two hands "coincide" by bringing them together in a very specific gesture. Not, to be sure, in the "empty" gesture of clasping one hand with the other. That is no "coincidence" of hands, only a confirmation of their mutual opposition. But in the "full" gesture of bringing the two hands together through the mediation of some obstacle, some object. Let this kind of gesture be called the "gesture of making". The purpose of the gesture is to make our two hands "coincide" within the object grasped between them. The object changes its shape under the pressure of our two hands which try to come together through it, and it is this new shape of the thing that is how our two hands coincide. The gesture of making changes the shape of the things around us, "at our hands", and by thus "informing" our world, (changing its form), the gesture succeeds, in a sense, to make our two hands coincide, and thus overcome the human condition.

To be sure: many of the terms we use to describe the gesture of our hands as they try to coincide within the object have acquired by now an "abstract" meaning. So, much so that we tend to forget that such a meaning has been "abstracted" from hand gestures. Terms like "grasp", "seize", "apprehend", "comprehend", "manipulate", "handle", "manufacture". This shift of meaning from hands toward mind is however, in itself, revealing. It shows to what extend the gesture of making, of having our two hands coincide within an object, is the

model of our thought processes. If we were to imagine a being just as capable of thought as we are, but with no hands comparable to ours, we would see how totally different would be its thought structures. Let us suppose that the deep sea octopus has a brain capacity similar to the human one: but it would be incapable of conceiving, of defining, of calculating, because those are aspects of hand gestures.

[…] Thus the curious symmetry of our hands, this opposition which allows no immediate coincidence, imposes the world its dialectical structure. […]

Our hands are almost always in motion, but almost never in a disorganized one. There are various very complex patterns to how hands move, and those patterns have to do with various levels of relations. There is the relation of each fingers to the thumb, there is the relation of the fingers to the palm of the hand and of the other hand, there is the relation of the hand to both arms and to other body organs, there is, above all, that curiously symmetrical relation of the hands to each other. If we were to fix the line the hands follow while moving, for instance on a surface like in action painting, or on a video tape, we would probably discover an image of quite unbearable beauty: the image of our being-in-the-world. But do we not dispose in fact of just such an image? I mean of course: is not the world of art and artefact, the world of culture which surround us, a fixation of the lines human hands have followed in the course of the ages? Not quite: it is the fixation of those lines as they have been broken, again and again, by the resistance offered by the objective world.

The complexity of the motions of our hands is such that it defies description. But the gesture of making, which is only among those motions, may be decomposed, for "didactical" purposes, in a few relatively more simple phases. Let us repeat the basic structure of that gesture: the two hands reach out into the world of objects, seize one of those objects, tear it out of its context, and then press upon it from their two sides, in order to coincide within it. […]

First, then, the hands reach out into the world, arms outstretched, fingers wide open, palms facing each other. We know that sort of gesture. It has to do with friendly welcome, with admission of an adventure, with opening oneself to the future. Let us call this phase the gesture of "perception". But let us not be fooled by its passive, friendly, submissive aspect. Perception is not merely reception. It is, if watched more closely, a violently active gesture. It does violence to the world, it acts upon the future. It divides the world into a region be-

tween the two palms, (which it admits), and all the rest, (which it refuses). It opens a channel for the future to flow in, and by doing this, it excludes all the events which lie outside that channel. It is a segregating, (or, as Kant would say: categorical), gesture. It receives the world of objects, to be sure, but within categories imposed upon the world by the very gesture of perception.

[…] Hand motions are never "pure" motions. They are "practical", have a purpose. Because the gesture of apprehending is a practical one, it need not go on until it has learned everything about the object. That would be an absurd undertaking. Hands can never learn every side of the object, because there is practically an infinite number of sides to every object. This is, in fact, what makes of the object a part of the concrete world: this practical infinity of its sides, this uniqueness which permits no comparison with other objects, no generalisation.

[…] The object is now practically comprehended, which means: previous gestures of making suggest methods how to change this one. […] And there is a curious aspect to the motion of comprehension, "curious" in the strict sense of the term. Hands seem to like to play with objects not yet comprehended, in order to comprehend them. This curiosity of hands may be explained very noble by saying that the hands of men are the organs through which men take an ever increasing possession of the objective world, and that "curiosity" is the climate in which this conquest progresses. But if we keep our attention centered on those hands themselves, we need no such noble explanation. If hands in their motion of meeting each other strike against objects already having been comprehended, they do not waste much time in fingering and handling them: they proceed in their motion. But if they strike against so far not comprehended objects, they must perform the gesture of comprehension, if they are to proceed in their motion toward each other. They must "conquer progressively the world". Curiosity, progressive comprehension and the urge for it, are thus seen to be an aspect inherent in hands and their motion of making. […] The comprehended object is now being held between our two hands. […] In the figurative distinction the left hand may be called the hand of "praxis", and the right one the hand of "theory", and the gesture of making that follows may be considered to be that motion in which "praxis" and "theory" attempt to meet each other. A motion through which the left hand tries to meet the right by transforming the object into what it ought to be, and through which the right hand tries to meet the left one by transforming what ought to be into the object. […] All of a sudden, the two hands try to impress a value upon the object, a shape, a form, and the left hand tries to press the object into the form, while the right hand tries to press the form upon the object. Let us call this phase: the gesture of "evaluation". It is as if the two hands had somehow agreed upon a form

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suitable to this specific object. It is as if they had comprehend that the object leather is good for the shoe form and that the shoe form is "good" for the object "leather". Evaluation then is this gesture of weighing the scale of object against the scale of form, this choosing of a suitable form for an object comprehended. […]

Once the object has been evaluated, the two hands press upon it to force it into the form. They violate it: they do not permit it to be as it is. They deny the object as an object. They affirm themselves with regard to the object, and by thus affirming themselves they affirm the object as virtual product. This phase of the gesture may be called the gesture of "production". It tears the object out of its context, which is the objective world, and inserts it into a different context, the world of products, of culture, of civilisation. To pro-duce is to lead an object out of one world into another. To change its ontological standing. […]

The point involved in this description of the gesture of manufacturing is, of course, what our tradition calls "vocation". But the observation of the gesture has the advantage of de-mythifying the concept of vocation. It is not the result of some mysterious voice which calls to the hands from somewhere "within" to choose this object there and impose a form upon it. And it is not only specifically "noble" objects like musical sounds, words or canvasses which are thus chosen by vocation. Vocation is seen to be the result for the discovery by the hands of their own specific attitude within an understood object, any object. There is the vocation for making shoes just as much as there is a vocation for making poems and it does not result form some mysterious special election, but from the fact that every single pair of hands has its own, specific attitude, its own, specific way of moving in the world of objects. […]

Observation of the gesture shows that new forms are always elaborated under the pressure of objective resistance. They do not spring, ready, out of some "inner inspiration", like Pallas Athene out of the head of Zeus, as our romantic tradition would have us believe, but they result from the shock between an already established form and the resistance of a specific raw material against it. To "have new ideas" is not creative. Creation is to elaborate new ideas in the process of making. Hands do not realize themselves creatively, if they impress stereotypes, (already established ideas), on raw material prepared "ad hoc", which is the process of industrial manufacture. They realize themselves creatively only, if they impress prototypes, (new ideas), upon a raw material which is really raw, namely being understood by the hands during this specific process of manufacture.

In the present situation, it is in laboratories, in studios and similar places, but not in factories of the mass media, that one may observe the gesture of creation. The present pernicious division between stereotypical and prototypical gestures, between the alienated and the true

gesture of making, is one of the roots of our crisis.[…]

Now let us look at the result of this complex, and so characteristically human gesture. The most obvious result is that a piece of the objective world has been torn out of its context and has become as it should be. It has achieved value. An almost equally obvious result is that the hands have left a trace upon the world which will remain there for some time after their own disappearance. The hands have realized themselves. But although these two aspects are obvious, there is a taste of defeat in this victorious result of the gesture. Not only because the object does not show the form originally pretended by the hands, and therefore cannot be said to have been informed as it should be. In this sense Plato is right, of course, and to make is always "betray perfect forms". But also because the two hands cannot really coincide within the manufactured object, and become a "totality", a synthesis of oppositions. Right and left, theory and praxis, value and reality, form and matter, (or however one wants to call the two sides of the opposition), cannot really coincide in the "work", the manufactured object, because such a coincidence is a "limit situation" of the gesture of making. The two hands advance within the object to meet each other, they come ever nearer and nearer, but their meeting is a situation, which can be infinitely approached, but never really accomplished. The gesture of making shows this to be so: at no point it is possible to say that the work is finished, ("perfect").

The gesture of making ends when the two hands withdraw from the object, open their palms in a wide angle, and let the object slip into the context of valuable objects, of "culture". We know, of course, this sort of gesture. It is the gesture of giving, of sacrifice, of resignation. Let us call it the gesture of "exhibiting". Hands perform this gesture at a very imprecise point in the course of realisation, when it has become obvious that any further progress toward co-incidence, toward perfection", has become insignificant, "infinitesimal". When it has become obvious that any further attempt to achieve totality will not really change the object. Hands exhibit their work, not when they are satisfied with it, but when they are satisfied that they can make nothing further. Thus to exhibit is a gesture of resignation.

But it is more than that. Although it is, in a sense, the last stage of the gesture of making, it has an entirely different structure. It is a loving gesture. The fundamental structure of the gesture of making is hatred. It is the gesture of defining, confining, violating and changing. The gesture of exhibiting is of a different world: it is one of offering, of abandon. The hands offer their work, and thus themselves to other human beings. They "publish", they make public. To exhibit is a political gesture. A gesture which puts itself at the disposal of others.

And since it is the last phase of the gesture of making, it shows what making is all about: it is a gesture which seeks "perfection" through impression of values upon objects for the sake of others. Seen thus, as a whole, the gesture of making is a frustrated loving gesture.

Let us resume what was said here concerning the gesture of making: One may observe how man is in the world, if one observes how his hands move about in it. They move dialectically, because there are two of them, and because their symmetry is one of opposition. Some of their motions show especially well this attempt of the hands to achieve a synthesis of their opposition, and the gesture of making is one such motion. It may be considered to be a series of gestures, one following the other. The present investigation has distinguished between various such phases, although, of course, other observers may suggest a different classification: (a) perception, (b) apprehension, (c) comprehension, (d) evaluation, (e) production, (f) understanding, (g) manufacture, (h) creation, (i) tool making, (j) realisation, and (k) exhibition. Each of those phases has its own existential climate. They are specific forms of being-in-the-world. But there is an overall climate to the gesture of making: it is the climate of violent search of perfection in the objective world for the sake of others and it ends in loving resignation.

Hands may seem disgusting to unhuman observers as they move in the various stages of the gesture of making. But for us, who are those hands as they move, or who are those hands that will receive the result of that motion, hands are the fountain of truth, of beauty, of value.

* Flussers work on „gestures" started in 1974. Flusser wrote manuscripts on "the phenomenology of the human gesture" for lectures to give and books to be published in four languages. "The gesture of making" is published in German in Vilém Flusser, Gesten. Versuch einer Phänomenologie. Düsseldorf and Bensheim 1991. From 1994 onwards Fischer republished it. There is a translation into Spanish published as Los Gestos. Fenomenologia y Comunicación in Barcelona by Herder in 1994. In 1999 Les Gestes was published in Paris. Here a radically shortened version of Flussers English text is used.