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## Dialectics of Media, Critique of Image, and Construction of the World: Three Faces of Vilém Flusser's Technical Image Theory

“My life has been a life without religion but in search of religion; could this not be, perhaps, a definition of philosophy, or at least of a type of philosophy?”

*Vilém Flusser*

### *Introduction*

In 1920, Vilém Flusser (1920–1991) was born into a Jewish intellectual family in Prague<sup>1</sup>, the capital of the Czech Republic, and entered the University of Prague to study philosophy in 1938. In the following year, under the cloud of the outbreak of World War II, he fled to the United Kingdom via the Netherlands, and immigrated to Brazil in 1940. In the 1960s, he taught philosophy and communication at academic institutions such as the University of São Paulo. In 1972, Flusser bid farewell to Brazil, which was under military dictatorship, and returned to Europe with his family. He settled and gave lectures in Italy and France successively. In 1991, he was invited by Friedrich Kittler as a visiting professor at Ruhr University Bochum. That same year, on the way back to his hometown Prague after a lecture, the thinker, who had lived a life of wandering, died in a car accident on the German border.

According to Siegfried Zielinski<sup>2</sup>, science, philosophy, semiotics and linguistics that interact with “media” were not formulated and dealt with as a distinct discourse field until after World War II. He divided the media thinkers since the end of World War II into seven generations per decade. Flusser, regarded as a philosopher of culture and technology, spanned the development of two generations of media thoughts: Flusser in Brazil belongs to the second generation active since the 1960s, and other famous thinkers of the time also include Guy Debord, Jürgen Habermas, Paul Virilio, Raymond Williams, Nam June Paik, etc.; After returning to Europe, Flusser, together with Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Friedrich Kittler, Sybille Krämer, Siegfried Zielinski and others, belongs to the fourth generation that was remarkable since the 1980s [22, pp. xxii–xxiii].

<sup>1</sup> Flusser's father, Gustav Flusser (Gustav Flusser, 1885–1940), had followed Einstein to study mathematics and physics, and later taught at a Czech university. He was a member of the Czech Social Democratic Party [18].

<sup>2</sup> In 1992, “The Vilém Flusser Archive” project was established in The Hague and Munich, and Zielinski was commissioned to manage the archive in 1998. In 2007, the archive moved with Zielinski to the UDK Universitaet der Kuenste Berlin). The Archive currently holds approximately 2,500 Flusser's manuscripts, publications and letters, a large number of video and audio files and second-hand documents.

Flusser's important intellectual heritage is receiving more and more attention and research in the fields of media studies, communication philosophy and art theory. On the whole, his thoughts have experienced roughly three stages of development. In the "Brazil period" from 1950s to 1960s, he mainly focused on theology, philosophy of language and the relationship between language and human thinking<sup>3</sup>. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, after returning to Europe, Flusser showed a strong interest in the emerging telecommunication technologies, and continued his long-term concern about the issue of human communication. He published a series of important works on media theory such as *Kommunikologie* (Communication), *The Surprising Phenomenon of Human Communication*, and "The Trilogy of Media Theory". His thinking on key issues such as the structure of human communication, the relationship between text and image, and new media technology laid the core ideas of his media philosophy. These writings made him famous and paved the way for his position in European academia. During the period from the mid-to-late 1980s to his unexpected death, Flusser mainly continued his exploration in three directions: The first is metaphysics of subjectivity. *Gesten: Versuch einer Phänomenologie* (*Gestures: An Attempt of Phenomenology*, 1991) and *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design* (1993) both reflect his existential thinking in discussing human subjectivity and freedom with a phenomenological approach. *Vom Subjekt zum Projekt: Menschwerdung* (*From Subject to Projection: Becoming Human*, 1994) is Flusser's unfinished posthumous work, which can be regarded as a summary of his late philosophical thoughts. The second direction may be summarized as post-human research. After *Ins Universum der Technischen Bilder* (*Into the Universe of Technical Images*, 1985), Flusser's imagination of the future existence of human beings is further manifested through different themes and forms. For example, in the science fiction novel *Vampyrotheutis Infernalis* (1987) co-authored with French artist Louis Bec, by imagining a deep-sea "monster" that coexists with and opposes humans, he considers how humans rediscover themselves from a reflective anthropocentrism and post-human perspective. The third direction is to explore the issues of immigration and nationalism. *The Freedom of the Migrant: Objections to Nationalism* (2003) embodies Flusser's reflections on globalization, information society, migration and national identity in modern society that have been launched since the 1970s.

As a whole, philosophy of language, phenomenology, existentialism, and Jewish-Christian ethics have always been important backgrounds of Flusser's thoughts, with "language", "communication", "information", "science", "art", "creation", "the other", and "freedom" as the key words. In "The Trilogy of Media Theory" completed in the 1980s — *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie* (*Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, 1983), *Into the Universe of Technical Image* (1985) and *Die Schrift. Hat Schreiben Zukunft?* (*Does Writing Have a Future*, 1987), Flusser gradually deepened his theoretical construction on image and media philosophy. Starting from criticizing the domination of technical images over human beings in the post-industrial society, he tries to explore how to critically accept technical images in the "post-historical" crisis, after the world was abstracted into a zero-dimensional world, that is, after "the end of history", thus opening a path to the post-historical era.

<sup>3</sup> Flusser's first monograph in Portuguese, *Língua e Realidade* (*Language and Reality*, 1963), reinterprets the thoughts of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, and explores the possibility of the compatibility between logicism and existentialism. It interprets the viewpoint of "language is reality" from the aspects of language endowing reality with form, language spreading reality and language creating reality.

### 1. *Dialectics of Media and Ontology of Technical Image*

In Flusser's image theory, the history of image production and reception is a history of human beings constantly creating and endowing the world and themselves with "meaning". From an ontological point of view, his basic definition of images is that images are "meaningful surfaces", "complexes of symbols" and "complexes of meanings" with ambiguous meanings, and its most important anthropological significance lies in serving the mission of making human beings what they are, as an intermediary between the world and human beings.

This means that images are a system of symbols, and the production of images is a coding process that reduces the world (phenomena) from four-dimensional space to two-dimensional planes (symbols) through abstraction, which is one of the ways for human beings to grasp and recognize the external world; The reception of images is the decoding process of deciphering and giving meaning to symbols, which is also a process of re-visualizing, and is one of the ways for human beings to act and change the external world. Flusser generalized the above-mentioned abstraction and visualization abilities closely related to images as human "imagination" and "envision". The history of images is a history of human beings constantly creating and giving meaning to the world and themselves.

Flusser's definition of technical image has two stages of development. The concept of "technical image" was first put forward in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* published in 1983, and it is considered as "an images generated by an apparatus, which depends on technical devices". In 1985, *Into the Universe of Technical Image* further pointed out that technical images should be understood from the perspective of the relationship between technical images and the new way of life of human beings, and from the perspective of "the essence of human existence in the world". The invention of technical images is regarded by Flusser as the second fundamental turn of human civilization after the "invention of linear writing". Photographs are the earliest technical images produced through the "black box" apparatus of the camera, which suggests a future road to technical images — "The invention of photograph is a historical event as equally decisive as the invention of writing. With writing, history in the narrower sense begins as a struggle against idolatry. With photography, 'post-history' begins as a struggle against textolatry" [6, pp. 17-18].

From the perspective of the emergence of technical images, Flusser's construction of the ontology of technical images is based on two theoretical clues. The first is the five-step model of human history and culture. The second is the media dialectical movement between image and text in the evolution path of the above model.

In *Into the Universe of Technical Image*, Flusser divides human history into five stages, namely, a four-dimensional space-time continuum, a three-dimensional world, a two-dimensional world of traditional images, a one-dimensional world of linear texts and a dimensionless world of technical images. This model includes the leaping of five levels of human civilization, that is, the sequential advancement of the five stages of primitive human era, prehistoric era, "pre-history" era, "history" era and "post-history" era. This process is also the media dialectical movement of images and texts. In this process, the main way humans deal with the world has developed: from concrete experience, grasping and shaping, observation and imagination, understanding and interpretation, to computation and calculation. This reveals the development of the dominant consciousness used by human beings to process the objective world: the traditional image era is dominated by imaginative thinking, the linear text era is dominated by conceptual thinking, and the technical image era has ushered in the history of the dom-

inant position of computational thinking. Flusser believes that the dialectical movement of images and texts should be understood as the basic dynamic mechanism of the development of human civilization. The relationship between texts and images is the crucial question of our “history”. “The struggle of writing against the image — historical consciousness against magic — runs throughout history” [6, p. 11].

In the media dialectical movement of images and texts, the crisis of media alienation appears. According to Flusser’s point of view, the purpose of human inventing images is to understand the world. Two-dimensional traditional images have played this role by abstracting the objective world into symbols, but human beings gradually moved towards iconolatry, that is, “image worship”. Images turn the world itself into images through the visualization of all reality. This kind of alienation of images makes images become an obstacle for people to grasp the reality of the world, so texts came into being. The intention of inventing writing is to decipher the image that has become a mystery. Linear texts achieve this goal by abstracting traditional images into concepts through human’s “historical awareness” and the ability of conceptual thinking characterized by linearity and causality. As Flusser put it, “History, in the precise meaning of the word, is a progressive transcoding of images into concepts, a progressive elucidation of ideas, a progressive disenchantment (taking the magic out of things), a progressive process of comprehension” [6, p. 13]. However, in the process of explaining and disenchanting images with words, human beings are gradually moving towards textolatry, that is, “text worship”. As a result, texts become more abstract and eventually become as incomprehensible as traditional images, which is typically represented by scientific discourse. “If the text becomes incomprehensible, however, there is nothing left to explain, and history has come to an end” [6, p. 13]. It was in this crisis of words and texts, of this “end of history”, that the technical image was invented.<sup>4</sup> Text is an abstraction of traditional image, while technical image is an abstraction of text. A technical image is a conceptual image in essence. The arrival of the era of technical images means that human image civilization and text civilization have achieved a higher level of synthesis at a new level of consciousness, which opens up a new stage of crisis and possible coexistence of “post-history”.

In short, from the perspective of the dialectics of media, human civilization has developed from planar traditional image civilization to linear text civilization and particle technical image civilization. In Flusser’s view, texts and images are associated with different levels of human consciousness and civilization, but as the intermediary between people and the world, they involve the same core issues, that is, the relationship between man and the world and the way of human existence. Images and texts coexist in alternate crises, transforming each other, resisting each other and achieving each other. Under such a Hegelian dialectical movement, in the face of the so-called text crisis, the technical image as “image 2.0” or the advanced synthesis of image and text, has become a new course for human future after “post-history” depicted by Flusser.

## 2. *Technical Images and Critique of Post-industrial Society*

Flusser’s technical image theory has a profound connection with his critique of post-industrial society.

<sup>4</sup> Flusser further developed his thinking on the relationship between text crisis and image crisis in *Does Writing Have a Future?* following *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* and *Into the Universe of Technical Images*.

The producer of technical images is the combination of apparatus and human, and technical images are generated in the intricate confrontation and cooperation between them. This kind of producer is called “apparatus/operator complex” by Flusser in the philosophy of photography. The apparatus is the representative product of the post-industrial era and the achievement of scientific texts, that is, advanced linear texts. The programming of the apparatus and the intention of the photographer are mutually functional. This means that although an image apparatus such as a camera executes the decisions of the photographer, what the photographer can do is within the range set by the apparatus program, which is a limited freedom.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the generation of technical images represents the game relationship between human and apparatus, which is both cooperative and antagonistic.

In terms of the producer and generation process of technical images, Flusser’s media thinking has always been open to two interrelated aspects: the critical reflection on history and the present, and the construction of future plans. Flusser is not a “technological determinist” or a “technological optimist”. His attitude towards technical images is not completely affirmative or blindly optimistic. On the contrary, he firstly reflects and criticizes the early technical image world in the post-industrial society.

When Flusser focused on his technical image theory in the early to mid-1980s, he believed that we were still in the initial stage of technical image development, that is, the “pre-telecommunication society” period. Human beings at this stage are subject to the governing of apparatuses and technical images and lose their critical abilities and subjective freedom. In this “post-historical” period, as Flusser calls it, the crisis facing mankind mainly includes three aspects. One is the fascist transformation of social structure and ideology by technical images, and the invention of false political democracy. The second is the deprivation of the critical consciousness and historical consciousness of human beings developed in the linear text civilization. In the mutual parasitic relationship between images and events, history itself becomes images. The last but not least disaster is the destruction of human subjectivity and freedom.

To be specific, first of all, Flusser holds that the current “societies of control” dominated by technical images presents a centrally empty, radial, and discrete social structure, in which people become the function of apparatuses. This situation is related to the transmission route of technical images. In this highly programmed and automated world, the central position is no longer a power entity, but the sender of technical images. This sender is the executor of the apparatus’s function. Under the instruction of the apparatuses, the function executors “press the key” to make the technical image reach the information receiver at the terminal through the automatic dissemination program. Second, technical images have brought about subversive changes in the relationship between images and history — events become images, and images create events. For example, the technical image mechanism enables people today to freely adapt images of a war that took place a hundred years ago, thereby changing history and creating new events in a certain sense. In a relationship where events and images parasitize and nurture each other, all historical and realistic events can become the material

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<sup>5</sup> Flusser distinguishes fully automated apparatuses from non-fully automated apparatuses (that is, apparatuses that require humans as players or function performers, such as cameras). The features described here are aimed at the image production of semi-automatic apparatuses, which can be understood as early technical images. These technical images require human intervention in the process of image generation. Flusser calls this image production “human photography for the purpose of visualizing something,” which distinguishes it from fully automatic photographic types of technical images (such as images taken by satellites) [6, pp. 31–32].

of images. Events no longer appear to change the world, but to image themselves. Images constantly renew themselves by absorbing the nourishment of history, and consequently devour history. Ultimately, history develops into images — that is “post-history”. Third, the recoding of history by technical images has also led to profound changes in the relationship between subject and history. The technical image entices humans to form closed feedback loops in their interactions with it. As a result, images become a medium between human beings and images, rather than serving as a medium of communication between people; images have reached a consensus with people, but the human community has gradually lost consensus. In other words, human actions are transformed into some false rituals and procedures. This kind of action is no longer out of its own purpose, no longer out of real responsibility and freedom, but only responds to the requirements of the image. As a result, people have lost the ability to project critical consciousness and action to the real world, as well as the agency to truly understand and create history.

In short, Flusser’s cultural critique of totalitarianism, consumerism, mass culture, and media ecology in the western post-industrial society is embedded in his discussion of technical images. In the flood of images of mass culture, images not only devour and exhaust history, but also suppress the critical consciousness developed by human beings in the civilization of writing and text, and damage the collectiveness and intimacy of the relationship between subjects. Behind the ghosts that have been dispelled, more and more new ghosts are being summoned. These problems together reveal that the manipulation of technical images has produced a new “illiteracy” in the image age. The historical consciousness and critical consciousness of human beings have been suppressed, and they have become the executors of apparatus functions and the feedback supply of apparatus. The procedural and automatic characteristics of the apparatus are transplanted to human, and people are increasingly alienated from reality and each other. Moreover, the ability of human beings to create new information has also been severely damaged, and the development of civilization will lead to the decline of entropy. In a nutshell, the alienated control of technical images becomes the proof that the apparatus has conquered human beings, which is the loss of human freedom. As a result, human beings have changed from “historical man” into “ahistorical man” or “post-historical man”. In Flusser’s conception, this situation known as the pre-telematic society is a throe of human history that needs to be overcome and surpassed, and should be replaced by a more mature telecommunication society.

### *3. Technical Images and Construction of the World*

So far, we have come to the “world construction” aspect of Flusser’s technical image theory, that is, to ask what role the technical image plays in the transformation from the pre-telecommunication society to the developed telecommunication society. How can technical image construct the “universe of technical image” that Flusser advocates? The possible answers can be understood from political, cultural and ethical aspects.

Politically, the telecommunication society will exert the social integration power of technical images, reverse the totalitarianism and information imperialism of apparatus, integrate discrete social structures, and build a road to a dialogic democratic society. According to Flusser, the invention of the technical image arose from the crisis of human communication. To clarify the dynamic mechanism of human communication<sup>6</sup>, Flusser distinguishes

<sup>6</sup> Flusser distinguishes between “natural communication” and “cultural communication”, and he is dis-

two types of human communication structures in his theory of communication: “discourse” and “dialogue”<sup>7</sup>. The key difference between the two structures lies in the relationship between the sender and the receiver of the information: “discourse” is dominated by the transmission of information, while in the “dialogue” structure, the roles of sender and receiver can be switched to each other, and the information is in a state of oscillating and updating state, which enriches the production of information. “Dialogue” enables the new information produced by individuals to enter the public sphere from the private sphere, and transform it into a public democratic value. Moreover, this model makes immediate and direct responses possible in communication. In this sense, dialogue is a responsible political attitude and action. Thus, in the telematic society, the task of revolution falls to the producers of technical images, the programmers. By reconstructing the transmission path and feedback loop of technical images in a cybernetic sense, the revolutionaries would not rebel against the image itself, but the consensus reached between people and images on the information feedback loop. The purpose of the revolution is to encourage the subject to construct a new communication structure and interpersonal relationship through technical images, to re-integrate the discrete and fragmented public domain, to create a new social structure, and transform the communication between people and images back into the communication between people. In short, as a new form of “communication machine” that is a complex of human and apparatus, technical images reconstruct the information feedback loop of human society, reform the information channel, and open up new possibilities for human communication behavior that resists the increase of information entropy.

So, why does Flusser put “dialogue” at the core of the new world of technical images? We find that if the ideas of information theory and cybernetics provide the inspiration of technology and social dimensions for Flusser’s technical image theory, then the dialogue philosophy of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber gives it a thick ethical dimension of existentialism. In his book *Ich und Du* (*I and Thou*, 1923), Buber put forward an ethical proposition of relational ontology, emphasizing that the “I-You” relationship is a dialogue relationship, which is a direct “encounter”. This kind of dialogue ethics has a relationship structure of “call” and “response”, which requires people to open themselves and realize their responsibilities to others through “response” to the “call” of others they encounter in their lives. Buber’s reflection on the subject philosophy of Descartes’ solipsism, his understanding of the close relationship between language and human existence, and his exploration of the ontological path of human existence from the perspective of dialogue philosophy have deeply inspired Flusser to think about human communication as a cultural phenomenon from the perspective of existentialism. Flusser proposes that, on the one hand, communication is a way for human beings to fight against the increase of information entropy, and it is the basis for the survival of human civilization; on the other hand, the significance of communication lies in the fact that it is the action of human beings to give meaning to their meaningless existence towards death, and it is the manifestation of human freedom. The technical image must therefore be interpreted in the context of the revolution in human communication of which it is the latest and most powerful manifestation. The dialogic reconstruction of human society by technical images is an action in pursuit of “dialogic existence”, which is connected with a philosophy of dialogue existentialism.

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cussing human communication in the sense of cultural communication here.

<sup>7</sup> Flusser further distinguishes four discursive structures (the pyramid, the tree, the theatre, and the amphitheatre structures) and two dialogical structures (circles and networks) [14, pp. 72–91].

Secondly, technical images are closely related to the construction of human beings towards immaterial civilization. The development of technical images is compatible with the dematerialization of information and the transformation of human civilization paradigms. In Flusser's view, telematics has made books, television, postal services, exhibitions and many other things with the nature of "discourse" redundant at the technical level. A "pure information society" [6, p.108] is a society where the material support of information has completely disappeared. The construction of the immaterial technical image world also means the physical transformation of human civilization. The dualism of body and mind in Flusser's thought makes him clearly advocate the rejection and cancellation of the flesh in the future of human beings and technology. Influenced by the Judeo-Christian thought of admiring the spirit and belittling the body, he believes that the material limitations of human body must be overcome and transcended, and that the contempt and dematerialization of physical things will open up an unprecedented freedom for human beings. In this world, human beings should avoid the body becoming the destroyer of their own mental life. If medicine cannot repair the disturbing element of the heavy physical body, then it should be abandoned and forgotten, and human beings should focus their interest on the pursuit of spiritual eternal existence<sup>8</sup>. As a result, all physical existence will "shrink", and information without bodies, objects, and immaterial will promote the changes in the nature of human existence, creating a brain-like society based on pure information. Humans are thus able to escape physical pain and fatal death and achieve "immortality". This immaterial form of cultural is what Flusser calls "the telematic society as a global superbrain" [10, p. 90]. This superbrain is a global nervous system automatically manipulated by technical images. In this vision, the operation of human society will move towards full automation, in which only the creation of "meaning" is not automatic.

Further, technical images are related to the subject freedom of human beings in the new world. According to Flusser, technical image is about the game and art of creation. The development of human history is a process of continuous production and accumulation of information, and human communication behavior is a process of participating in the creation of new information. Technical image means that human beings no longer just search for the inherent information of an object, but are free to create information themselves. After the advent of the computer age, creation has become a synonym for "data processing" to some extent, that is, generating new information through the synthesis of existing information is creation. The information production of technical images with subjective intentions is also called "projection" by Flusser. It projects from the subject to the outside world, as an orientational existential gesture and action. Thus, the creator of the technical image becomes the one who projects meaning onto the world. Under this kind of free creation, technical images will bring a much richer dialogue than linear and historical textual dialogues, and greatly expand the information of human civilization in the production of meaningful dialogues. Moreover, this dialogical state of existence is a creative game in the sense of cybernetics. A world where games are played for the sake of games is a truly free world.

It is worth noting that in such a world, Flusser attaches great importance to the role of art and artists. As he puts it, "Such a society, in dialogue through images, would be a society of artists" [6, p. 85]. The technical image derived from "the dialectic between the theory embed-

<sup>8</sup> According to Flusser, the Confucian civilization in China and Japan shows the characteristics of advocating miniaturization, and the exclusion of the body in the telecommunication society resonates with it [10, pp. 137–138].



ded in the apparatuses and the intuitive hallucinatory power of the envisioners” [10, p. 103] will be art at a high level, and all the subjects who create technical images freely in the spirit of games will become “artists”.

Finally, as a media and mediation between man and the world, technical image makes a core issue clearer, that is, the relationship between people and the world and the way of human existence. “The traffic between images and people is the central problem of a society ruled by technical images. It is the point where the rising so-called information society may be re-structured and made humane” [10, p. 60]. Deeply influenced by Buber’s dialogue philosophy, as a Jewish existentialist, Flusser’s pursuit of authentic existence and the idea of constructing subjectivity through intersubjective relations constitute the ethical dimension of the freedom of the future world of technical images. Flusser hopes to recall the religious value expelled by modernity and secularization in the telematic society, restore the sacred status of “leisure” which has been economicized by the bourgeois industrial revolution and the automation revolution, and let mankind live a purposeless, useless, antieconomic and celebratory “religious life” again. And this kind of life must be realized in the “coexistence” with others. We find that Kierkegaard’s insight into religious life also permeates Flusser’s thought, that is, the power of “religious life” (a life before God, without purpose) is over “ethical life” (a purposeful life in politics and commerce) [10, p. 153]. Flusser sees that in the religious life pointed to by the world of technical images, the telecommunication technology “permits us to recognize ourselves in others through images festively, leisurely, without purpose” [10, p. 153].

In the telematic society, the focus of human beings should shift from “self-programming” — having one’s own unique and irreplaceable program — to “programs of others”, a function that allows others to continuously improve themselves. Through the medium of technical images, in “an open view of what is absolutely other” [10, p. 156], everyone sees other human beings as the other, and through each other, they will know and come to God as the absolute other. The world constructed by technical images is a world that allows people to “be with others”. A life that creates dialogue and meaning through technical images is a religiously celebrated life with and for others. “Dialogical programming of images (the dialogical life) can therefore be a celebration of God (of the absolute other), each one with all others and by means of all others, a prayer” [10, p. 156]. In Flusser’s view, this way of existence is not another “post-human” project, but the first time that human beings become a well-deserved “human” life, which is different from “pre-human”. This is undoubtedly his answer to how humankind can live and coexist in the new technological environment in the post-history era.

### *Conclusion*

The media thinking, communication philosophy and technical image theory Flusser elucidated in the 1980s, especially the concept of telecommunication society, are undoubtedly prophetic. This thinker in exile, who lost all his relatives in the Nazi persecution and suffered from the spiritual crisis brought by Auschwitz in his wandering life, has constructed a unique cultural philosophy connected with language, technology, media and religious philosophy through his lifelong nomadic thought practice.

Language, translation and philosophy are closely linked in Flusser’s thought and practice. For Flusser, translation is not only about the ability of language and writing, but also a philosophical action of the becoming of the subject. This echoes with his insights of “language is reality”, the groundless nature of human existence and self-realization based on intersub-

jectivity. From the standpoint of reflecting on the Enlightenment modernity, the scientific supremacy, the historical view of progressivism, and the transcendence of dualistic axiology, Flusser advocates a new philosophical thinking mode of coordination and cooperation between free imagination and reason, and calls for the concept of integration of science, art, philosophy and creation; from his Jewish identity and the Judeo-Christian ethics, he explores the relationship between self and others, freedom and responsibility through technical images. It is in this sense that the technical image provides new possibilities for humankind to step towards the post-history and beyond.

In his early work *The History of the Devil*, Flusser already suggested that Western civilization still needs to move on after the “devil” of Auschwitz. As he put it, “Maybe the moment has come, after such grandiose journeys, to return, somewhat modestly, to the deflated mind. Maybe we have reached, at this stage of “evolution,” the moment to have a little shame? After so many triumphs of the mind, after so many discoveries and inventions, after so many conquests and glories, perhaps the time for defeat has come?... However, a conviction detains our mind: it is not possible to be silent. Be it a plague or a blessing, be it a gift or a punishment, the impossibility of being silent is the symbol of continuity. The only message that this book has, therefore, is this: let us continue” [12, p. 217]<sup>9</sup>.

Human beings must orient themselves toward the post-history, and post-history must open up itself. From Flusser’s view of “translation” as a philosophical action of subject becoming, the philosophy of technical images is a philosophy of “translation”. Technical images should be regarded as the translational practice of humans entering post-history to relocate themselves, to defend their own freedom and to create a new humane civilization.

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<sup>9</sup> About Flusser’s critique of the Nazis and his study of the relationship between Auschwitz and Western civilization, see also [7; 11; 15].

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**Title.** Dialectics of Media, Critique of Image, and Construction of the World: Three Faces of Vilém Flusser's Technical Image Theory

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**Abstract.** Vilém Flusser's theory of technical images delved deeply into the ethical values of technical images in post-industrial society and their impact on the development of human civilization. This paper holds that technical images, emerging as a new possibility following the crises of traditional images and linear texts, play a crucial role in reshaping our understanding of the world, influencing human behavior, and altering social structures. Flusser's theory provides a perspective on constructing an ideal world of technical images through political dialogic reform, the development of immaterial culture, and the defense of human creativity. By emphasizing the double-edged nature of technical images, Flusser calls for an awareness of the responsibility in defending human subjectivity and promoting ethical social practices. This paper further explores how technical images, through the ethical dimensions of dialogue and coexistence, can build a more humane world and a new world order based on information and dialogue, offering a solution to the ethical challenges of post-industrial society. Furthermore, the paper underscores that in the epoch of technical images, humans should achieve a new mode of coexistence with the world through creative play and artistic actions with technical images.

**Keywords:** Vilém Flusser, technical image, dialectics of media, critique of image, construction of the world, post-history

**Название статьи.** Дialeктика медиа, гуманистическая коммуникология и глобальное конструирование мира: теория технических образов и постисторическая философия Виллема Флюссера

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**Аннотация.** Виллем Флюссер — бразильский философ чешского происхождения — является одной из наиболее значимых фигур в философии конца XX столетия. Однако в литературе, посвященной В. Флюссеру, взгляды данного мыслителя анализируются изолированно от интересующих его тем. В статье концепция технических образов В. Флюссера рассматривается в контексте проблематики теории медиа, коммуникаций и экзистенциальной философии. В работе представлены три этапа развития философии В. Флюссера, а также понятия «номадизма» и «перевода», которые являются ключевыми для понимания его концепций постистории и технического образа. Указанные конструкты увязываются с другими идеями В. Флюссера — дialeктикой медиа, гуманистической коммуникологией, критикой постиндустриального общества и техническим конструированием цифрового мира. В заключении намечены перспективы для дальнейшего исследования других проблем теории медиа и постистории, в том числе феноменов постгуманизма и постисторического человека.

**Ключевые слова:** Виллем Флюссер, технический образ, дialeктика медиа, гуманистическая коммуникология, техническое конструирование мира, постисторическая философия