

Vilém Flusser Translating Vilém Flusser

Prague born, Brazilian through immigration, Vilém Flusser, known mostly for his theory of media and communications, widened his analysis in his later years to include immigration. His essays on the subject employ an existential-phenomenological method, a perspective entirely missing within the debate in the United States and Europe in which immigration is a “problem” from a scientific or political perspective.

Among existentialists, none lived and wrote so significantly based on the fundamental experience of immigration as opposed to metaphysical exile and alienation. Flusser creates the image of an immigrant, thriving in chaos, who is able to enter into a dialectical relationship, giving and receiving new information corresponding to the objects brought and left behind from the old home.

Flusser wrote in numerous languages: German, Portuguese, French, Czech, and English. His use of these languages was affected by many factors: his European background, his interaction with the community of German Jews in Brazil and the Brazilian government, and his multiple immigrations. Because of the various languages in which he wrote, each country has a different conception of his work, for example, he is known in Germany for his media studies while in Brazil he is known primarily as a philosopher. In the United States his work is little known.

Translations of Flusser’s work, in order to gain a clear perspective of the entire opus, is a much needed project. Flusser could not keep up with translating his own work, which he did at times. Some, although not all, of his most important works have been translated; *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* for example has been widely translated into European and Asian languages. However, many of his works remain untranslated (and many unpublished) in his archives currently being held at the Berlin University of Arts.

This essay gives an introduction to the current state of Flusser translation, what particular difficulties exist in translating his work, and what future translations are in store.