

Abstract

Thomas Karlsohn, *Passage between Media. Vilém Flusser, the computer and the written word* [Passage mellan medier. Vilém Flusser, datorn och skriften], Ph. D. Dissertation, Department of History of Ideas and Theory of Science, Göteborg University, 2005, ISBN 91-628-6486-6.

This thesis is about Vilém Flusser (1920-1991), a philosopher of the media who was best known in the German-speaking world during the 1980s. Hitherto, penetrating studies that show Flusser's dependence on the idea-historical contexts in which his thought took shape have been lacking. By approaching Flusser's media-philosophical essays from the 80s via these contexts, we can gain a deeper understanding of his thought. The thesis focuses on the significance of the Jewish community in Prague between the wars, where Flusser spent his youth. Space is also devoted to his dependence on cybernetic theory and on various theories of writing.

This contextualizing approach is complemented, however, by an in depth reading of two of Flusser's most well known texts, *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder* and *Die Schrift. Hat Schreiben Zukunft?* Through a detailed analysis of these texts, I show not only *that* Flusser is influenced by different currents of ideas, but also *how* these various currents interact in his texts. The enquiry tackles the question of how the relationship between man and technology is depicted in the texts. I indicate how, in accordance with his ideas on what the essay as a form should mean, Flusser works with a method that involves a constant shifting of perspective. I also clarify how, on certain points, Flusser's texts show a clear ambivalence with regard the relationship between man and technology. This becomes particularly clear when the existential philosophical perspective is juxtaposed to other perspectives, such those of cybernetics and writing theory.

Through the study of a thinker like Vilém Flusser, it becomes possible to gain deeper insights into how information technology influences the shaping of ideas. The thesis concludes with Flusser being positioned in the debate on Postmodernism that was going on at the time he published his most influential essays. In this connection, I show that Flusser's thought in many respects can be said to be in line with that of the postmodernists. In other important respects, however, he stands out as an distinctive thinker.

Keywords: V. Flusser, theory of media, existential philosophy, cybernetics, theory of literacy, theory of the essay, philosophy of technology, M. Heidegger, E. Husserl, N. Wiener, M. McLuhan, J. Derrida.