Chapter 1 : Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design | Journal of Design History | Oxford Academic

Although "The Shape of Things" is a slim booklet, it is very difficult to do justice to Flusser's ideas in the space of a short review. Flusser's way of communicating complex ideas is highly idiosyncratic.

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content: Sean Cubitt The Shape of Things: Introduction by Martin Pawley. Reaktion Books, London, U. Introduction by Hubertus Von Amelunxen. The Freedom of the Migrant: Edited and with an introduction by Anke K. That is the significance of the translations of Flusser that have appeared in English in the last 5 years. Very soon, students will no longer accept an older generation being unfamiliar with Flusser, just as once we pilloried an older generation for their ignorance of Barthes and Eco. It implicates itself in the topic and in its reader. This is what makes it attractive" Writings, p. By this, or pretty much any other definition, Flusser is an essayist, a writer of short, provocative, probing, but also lucid, memorable and elegant works. Four books of his writings have appeared in English, of which only Towards a Philosophy of Photography is more than a collection of essays, but even that only runs to a slender 94 pages. According to Free Association Press, the publishers of another collection, the project to translate From Subject to Project: A small number of isolated pieces have been collected in anthologies or published online. Otherwise Flusser has yet to have a major impact on the English-speaking world, though there are increasing signs that his genial, challenging mixture of information theory, phenomenology and social philosophy will become a standard reference in the years ahead, as the dominance of French post-structuralism gives way to a more catholic range of influences. Flusser was born in This tradition of working in public, so significant to European intellectuals like Barthes and Eco, and so sadly lacking in the United Kingdom and United States, perhaps helps explain the clarity and dialogic quality of his writing, a conversational tone inviting agreement but also challenge and discussion. He moved to France and settled quietly in Provence in In , Towards a Philosophy of Photography appeared in German, to immediate applause. Other works followed, mostly so far untranslated. In Flusser died in a car crash after giving a lecture in his native You are not currently authenticated. View freely available titles:

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Shape of Things has ratings and 5 reviews. Philippe said: This slender booklet is a collection of short, late essays by the cosmopolitan thinker Vile.

Sean Cubitt Review Essay: That is the significance of the translations of Flusser that have appeared in English in the last five years. Very soon, our students will no longer accept that we are unfamiliar with Flusser, as once we pilloried an older generation for their ignorance of Barthes and Eco. Thus too Flusser, one of the most profound thinkers of technology and communication in the 20th century. It implicates itself in the topic and in its reader. By this, or pretty much any other definition, Flusser is an essayist, a writer of short, provocative, probing, but also lucid, memorable and elegant works. Four books of his writings have appeared in English, of which only Towards a Philosophy of Photography is more than a collection of essays, but even that only runs to a slender 94 pages. According to Free Association Press, the publishers of another collection, the project to translate From Subject to Project: A small number of isolated pieces have been collected in anthologies or published online. Otherwise Flusser has yet to have a major impact on the English-speaking world, though there are increasing signs that his genial, challenging mixture of information theory, phenomenology and social philosophy will become a standard reference in the years ahead, as the dominance of French post-structuralism gives way to a more catholic range of influences. Flusser was born in Thence to Brazil, where he worked in engineering, studying Husserl and the philosophy of language in his spare time. This tradition of working in public, so significant to European intellectuals like Barthes and Eco, and so sadly lacking in the UK and USA, perhaps helps explain the clarity and dialogic quality of his writing, a conversational tone inviting agreement but also challenge and discussion. In he moved to France and settled quietly in Provence. In , Towards a Philosophy of Photography appeared in German, to immediate applause. Other works followed, mostly so far untranslated. In he died in a car crash after giving a lecture in his native Prague. Plying an independent course between semiotics and informatics, he develops a concept of code which reveals the two theories to one another in ways that proved intractable to contemporaries like Anthony Wilden REF: Wilden, Anthony , System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange, Tavistock, London. Unimpressed by Saussure, Flusser was free of the internal structures of signifiers and signifieds that obsessed semioticians in the s and which met a nihilistic impasse in the work of Baudrillard. Instead he is able to concentrate on the rule-governed structures and the probabilistic measure of information content in systems like photography and later in computer code. In one sense Flusser can be distinguished from Baudrillard in this matter of code. Baudrillard sees code as self-replicating rule-structure. Thus his famous definition of a photograph: Codes embedded in the apparatus â€" photographic or more generally technical â€" derive from human usage new combinations to assimilate into the apparatus itself. Photographers are functionaries of an apparatus which, if analysis is extended back far enough, reaches into capital, corporations, politics and economics, a nested series of black boxes each governed by an elite of functionaries who nonetheless are prisoners of their own apparatus. The image code, he argues, has taken over from the linear code of writing and logic, of causality. In this sense it is post- historical. It addresses the question of freedom. In linear thinking, only the complexity of overdetermination allows anyone to be free: In such a realm of existential absurdity, where could freedom lie? Flusser argues that photographers, especially experimental photographers â€" and in Leonardo we can surely understand this to include all of us working in the field between science, art and technology â€" are the key. Those who play in and with the terms image, apparatus, program and information in the effort to produce the unexpected are playing against the camera, and against all apparatuses bedded in it. That is the meaning of freedom in the photographic universe. The argument is most persuasive perhaps in the essays on migration and nomadism collected in The Freedom of the Migrant. The migrant, willing or not, is forced out into a void, where meaning can no longer arise from habit or habitus. The bewildering moment can be handled in one of a number of ways. The migrant can cling to the home culture as an idealised vision â€" the culture of the expatriate. Or she can use the wrench into disorientation to claim freedom from the past and a new, ironic gaze upon both the home culture and the new place where she arrives.

What remains is for the migrant to seize the ironic moment of liberty and commit herself to using it in the context of the culture where she lands. Only in that engagement with change, that grasping of responsibility, does the migrant achieve her freedom. Lurking under this philosophical argument is a robust theory of information: Such a synthesis consists in an exchange of information. The word dialogue, like much of his vocabulary, has a special set of connotations the photography book has a fascinating glossary of some of his key terms. Dictatorship is stable, homeostatic in informational terms, but its stability depends on the reduction of information in the system, so that its stasis masks a real entropy. Nonetheless, even these battles are creative, because whatever the form of the dialogue, it cannot but bring something alien and unpredicted into the normal life of the culture. Without wishing to be rude to my hosts, transcribing these words during a visit to Australia, smirched by the ongoing shame of its handling of the Tampa refugees, feels particularly potent. The line of thought pursued through the question of freedom in an informatic system leads Flusser to some radical positions. What at one time was called the "self" or "I" is just such a realization of potentials, in the same way as is what was once called an "object" or "thing". It is simply that such outpouchings result from a concentration of a networked dispersion. What this means is that potentials gather together to be realized. I am whatever I am because a few dispersed potentials concentrated together. And the more densely they concentrate, the more realized I am. Or, as we have seen, for mutual antagonism, but nonetheless as accumulations of potential whose origins lie not in some founding individual self, but in the power of network flows to store without hoarding, and to transmit without losing, in processes of mutual interaction and change. The level of abstraction in such technical writings is not typical. In many ways the most sheerly delightful of the four titles so far published in English, the essays are playful, but full of sharp insights. In a joyful set of surprising turns, Flusser concludes that the immaterial is precisely form, that which allows the unformed stuff of the world â€" material â€" to appear. The book is full of elegantly translated gems: Lurking behind the mischievous argumentation of this essay on war and design is, I suspect, the untranslated book on the Devil â€" and a razor-sharp joke about the potential for evil of the philosophy of good design when taken as axiomatic. The essay on pots moves from an epistemological conundrum to a theological apocalypse in a series of easy, all too fatally comprehensible steps. Each premise of ordinary discourse about design is tested, tasted, chewed over and returned in often gruesome but always fascinating shapes. Instead we have to understand the technical image as a new form. Where prehistoric images attempted a magical translation of the world, the new images process pre-existing linear texts. Our images and their apparatuses are created from scientific formulae, philosophical arguments, historical narratives. But they process them into second-order images, if anything even more removed from the world than the texts they supplant. One thinks here of Feynman diagrams or Penrose tiles â€" images that visualise complex multidimensional math. If images now process texts, then writing can become the production of pre-texts for the apparatus of domination. Though we are condemned to emerge blinking into the light of post-history, where the long narratives of culture are replaced by the inexorable workings of the second law of thermodynamics, still we emerge, and in the unfamiliar light, have a choice to make. In fact, one could argue, against Flusser, that for precisely that reason we are still historical beings, still making our world, if we do not choose simply to accept it. An entirely understandable rejection of Marxism leaves Flusser without some strategic elements of a philosophy of the future: It does alter social relations, but not to the extent that he imagines. There are, then , reasons to read Flusser carefully, critically, but that is exactly what he asks us to do. The very elegance of his essayistic style is built of particles of argument that are also, to take up another of his metaphors, waves of history, waves whose definition becomes clearer as they recede, particles whose involutions dissipate across wider and wider fabrics of interaction as they move away from us into the past. So we can see with some greater clarity phenomena that were, scarcely a decade ago â€" the years before the web and ubiquitous mobile media â€" more tendencies than actualities. At worst, there will be a flurry of doctoral theses asserting true and correct interpretations. Which would be entirely out of sympathy with this most dialogical of modern thinkers.

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Chapter 4 : Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design, Flusser

The design he speaks of is not utilitarian design, but design in the broadest sense—from the production of a clay pot on a potter's wheel to the making of a universal man of the future. 'Design means, among other things, fate,' he explains.

Chapter 5 : The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design by Vilém Flusser

"This book presents for the first time in English an array of essays on design by the seminal Czech-born media critic and philosopher Vilem Flusser. It puts forward the view that our future depends on design.

Chapter 6 : Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design - Vilém Flusser - Google Books

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Chapter 7 : Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design by Vilém Flusser

In a series of insightful essays on such ordinary "things" as wheels, carpets, pots, umbrellas and tents, Flusser emphasizes the interrelationships between art and science, theology and technology, and archaeology and architecture.