«The omnipresent technical images around us are up to restructuring our "reality" magically around us and reverse it to a global scenario of images. Basically, it is a question of "oblivion". Man forgets, that it was him who generated the images to use them as an orientation in the world. He cannot decode them anymore and lives henceforth in mode of his own images: imagination has become hallucination"

– Vilém Flusser

Today's society is characterized by a multitude of different ideologies, corporations, and individuals, all with their separate ideas and worldviews. Each of these actors are constantly acting on us, trying to project onto us their worldview or their reality. This may be consciously, like animal rights activists telling you to save the Amazon, or it might be unconsciously, like your friend telling you to watch a movie because "its amazing". Throughout this text I will try to propose a philosophical question based on the quote above by Vilém Flusser, as well as connect the quote with the idea that one's own reality may no longer be dependent on the actual objective reality at all, and consequently how this may affect individuals as well as society as a whole. I use both reality and the world interchangeably to describe the world around us as it presents itself without a subjective interpretation, although one can argue that reality without subjective interpretation is impossible.

-

To formulate the philosophical question that the quote above implies, one must first dive into the philosophical ideas it presents. First, one must identify what "images" Flusser is referring to. The use of "omnipresent" must mean these images aren't physical. They may rather represent an idea, or a mental construct. More specifically the sentence "Man forgets, that it was him who generated the images to use them as an orientation in the world" leads me to believe Flusser refers to the, at the time, modern ideas and ideologies which still have the tendency to reduce the world around them to nothing more than it's utilitarian purpose. Since man himself created these images to use as orientation in the world, the images must be separate from the world. They are, in a way, superimposed on the world. "He cannot decode them anymore" may therefore refer to the fact that modern society relies so heavily on these ideas that they no longer are able to distinguish them from

reality. These images, who were once used as a tool to orient man in the world and therefore help understand it, now present themselves as reality itself.

Considering the hypothetical above, one may begin to formulate a philosophical question. The last sentence of the quote reads "He cannot decode them anymore and lives henceforth in mode of his own images: imagination has become hallucination". If one regards this as a form of conclusion to the statement, this will be the basis of the question. The words "imagination has become hallucination" must mean that the ideas constructed by man to help understand the world around him as well as the human nature itself, has become so important in humans understanding of the world, that the ideas has themselves turned into a reality. Since this reality is constructed by human imagination it must be a subjective recreation, therefore nothing but a hallucination. Considering then, that the quote presents a reality in which man no longer considers the world itself, but rather this man-made representation of it, the philosophical question may read as follows. How does one distinguish a man-made reality from actual reality, and how does this distinction affect individuals?

-

To discuss this question I'll first point out the similarities between the man-made reality or hallucination Flusser presents, and the hyperreality presented by Baudrillard. On both occasions the reality being presented is an incomplete recreation of the world that obscure the real nature hidden beneath. Reality then becomes nothing more than a feedback loop in which man creates and recreates his own reality. This reality cannot exist as it is only imagination, and yet it is still presented as real thereby the "hallucination". This leads me to think the nature of the reality presented is bad. To concretize, if one wants to buy an item of clothing there is two ways in which to do it. One can either buy it online, or physically in a store. Online the item would most likely be worn by a model who most likely would be digitally enhanced to look as beautiful as possible. In some cases, the colour would be enhanced to make the item of clothing look better. If one buys this clothing, they have not only bought the item itself, but the *idea* of it. This idea is nothing more than a recreation, made to look like reality. If one however buys the item from the store, it still comes with advertisement either for that exact item of clothing, or other similar items all vulnerable to the exact same modifications as the digital image. Furthermore, one is compelled to keep

shopping at that store due to coupon codes and two-for-one deals. In both cases the individual might be disappointed as the item did not match the idea of that item.

The example above may not initially relate as much to the hallucination presented by Flusser, and more to the hyperreality of Baudrillard, but extend this idea to political ideologies or larger worldviews and one might begin to see some semblance. How can one rely on an ideology's representation of reality? Furthermore, how can ideologies fully represent reality when the ideology in question is subjective? The reality it presents must be characterized by its objectives. If so, can anything present reality in an objective way, when it is presented by a person or multiple people? When one buys into an ideology and thereby that ideology's version of reality without regards to the actual reality, one reconstructs reality. This way the "images" created by man to orient themselves in the world has now become reality.

-

When discussing the quote, I can't help but think of the digitalisation modern society is going through. In this new terrain we are constantly bombarded with other opinions and by extension other worldviews. In a landscape where our own opinions are reduced to 250 characters or something similar, one can assume our reality suffers similarly. We are constantly told who to hate, love, agree, or disagree with. Whilst one may not think of one's own reality as fleeting, consider how much of that reality is a product of others. Why would Flusser use the word "oblivious" if not for the fact that we don't realise what is happening. Our reality is being manufactured, not because we choose to ignore it, but because we're oblivious to it. If we no longer can distinguish between objective reality and a reality manufactured to fit us perfectly, how can we hope to approach some objective truth if that even exists. Humans are constantly on the search for knowledge, but that knowledge needs to be anchored in some objective reality. If that reality is manufactured, consciously or unconsciously, how can we then rely on the knowledge built on its foundation? After all, if the foundations are wavering the house, and thereby our knowledge, might collapse.

-

I cannot say for certain whether the "images" Flusser mentions refers to ideologies, media or something else entirely. What I can say however, is that the problem he presents of

distinguishing man-made reality and imagination from the actual reality is highly relevant, especially considering the rise of advertising and the continuous debate regarding personalized content based on a person's personal data. Never before have our reality been so constructed. The question of how one distinguishes man-made reality from actual objective reality has never been so important, and yet the answer seems to elude us. There may not be one concrete answer at all, but rather a way to live in which scepticism takes control over blind belief and where reliability and trust in well-established ideologies and corporations falls away, replaced by individuality. In any case, the question seemingly proposed by Flusser remains one of, if not the most important question in our modern society.