

## HEIDEGGER'S CZECH-BRAZILIAN CHILD: VILÉM FLUSSER\*

VILÉM FLUSSER: O FILHO CHECO-BRASILEIRO DE HEIDEGGER

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### ABSTRACT

In a letter from June 1, 1964, to Vilém Flusser, the poet from Curitiba Paulo Leminski poses the following question: “Master Vilém: Which philosopher do you feel closest to (Heidegger)?” In his reply, dated September 20, Vilém Flusser confesses: “Dear friend... Heidegger is undoubtedly (along with Husserl and Dilthey) the one I would most like to surpass, and is, in this case, the most important.” This work aims to show, through an analysis of some aspects of Flusserian thought, how (or if) the Czech-Brazilian thinker attempts the ambitious task. My title, though clearly a play of words with Wolin’s expression, is not meant as a joke. I believe some of the main criteria Wolin used to identify his ‘four thinker’s as children of Heidegger also apply to Flusser. Since one of Flusser’s philosophical drives was to surpass Heidegger, it seems appropriate to approach the question from this particular perspective. Exactly, I am interested in seeing Flusser’s relationship with Heidegger, to the extent that this will allow us to understand how (if) Flusser manages to surpass Heidegger.

KEYWORDS: Heidegger. Flusser; transcension; ethics; intersubjectivity.

### RESUMO

Em carta datada de 1º de junho de 1964 endereçada a Vilém Flusser, o poeta de Curitiba Paulo Leminski formula a seguinte pergunta: “Mestre Vilém: de qual filósofo senti-vos mais próximo (Heidegger)?” Em sua resposta, datada de 20 de setembro, Flusser escreve: “Caro amigo... Heidegger é, sem dúvida (junto com Husserl e Dilthey), aquele que eu mais gostaria de superar e é, neste caso, o mais importante.” Este estudo se propõe mostrar, através da análise de alguns aspectos do pensamento flusseriano, como (se) Flusser enfrenta este desafio. Meu título, embora seja claramente um jogo de palavras com a expressão de Wolin, não pretende ser uma piada. Acredito que alguns dos principais critérios utilizados por Wolin para identificar seus “quatro pensadores” como filhos de Heidegger também se aplicam a Flusser. Visto que um dos impulsos filosóficos de Flusser era superar Heidegger, parece apropriado abordar a questão sob essa perspectiva específica. Portanto, interessa-me examinar a relação de Flusser com Heidegger, na medida em que isso nos permitirá compreender como (e se) Flusser consegue superar Heidegger.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Heidegger; Flusser; transcensão; ética; intersubjetividade.

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## OVERVIEW

First, the epithet *Heidegger's child* – in the title – is not my invention. I borrowed it from Richard Wolin's 2003 book: *Heidegger's Children*. There, Wolin designates four contemporary thinkers: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse as: 'Heidegger's children'. Second, the term is not pejorative, as "all four are significant philosophers in their own right," a fact that Wolin acknowledges (p. li). Yet, it has been questioned how offended some (or all) of them would be at being called 'children of Heidegger'. Perhaps 'students', or even 'disciples' – but *Children?* (Williams, 2009).

But that's not what I am going to do here.

My title, though clearly a play of words with Wolin's expression, is not meant as a joke. I believe some of the main criteria Wolin used to identify his 'four thinker's as children of Heidegger also apply to Flusser. Since one of Flusser's philosophical drives was to *surpass* Heidegger, it seems appropriate to approach the question from this particular perspective.

Exactly, I am interested in seeing Flusser's relationship with Heidegger, to the extent that this will allow us to understand how (if) Flusser manages to surpass Heidegger.

## 1 HEIDEGGER'S CHILDREN? WHY?

By Wolin's (2003, p. li) own admission, *Heidegger's Children* "is a study in what Harold Bloom called 'the anxiety of influence'". It seems that all four protagonists of his book suffered from this malaise. And they also share – as probable among *siblings* – specific features:

- (1) "all were Jewish and were also for a time 'convinced Heideggerians. Even Marcuse, who hailed from the political left, continued to idolize his fallen Master;"
- (2) and "All four... thought of themselves as assimilated Germans rather than as Jews. Yet this self-understanding would be severely put to the test by the antidemocratic – not to mention anti-Semitic – turn taken by German politics [and, apparently, by Heidegger] in the early 1930's". So, sooner or later, they would all have to:
- (3) face "Heidegger's zealous involvement with Nazism during the early 1930s" (at least) (Wolin, 2003, p. 5-6). Also, in the end, they would have to overcome the Master; mostly in two fundamental ways, namely:

- (4) by rethinking “the meaning of God after Auschwitz;” and by
- (5) rethinking “the ontological basis of ethics” (apparently completely absent from the Master’s works) (p. 107) – since, “basing ethics on the way things are – on Being – rather than on principles” (as it was the case with Heidegger?) (p. 124) seemed like a recipe for disaster.

Let us see which of these features Flusser shares with Wolin’s children of Heidegger.

## 2 FLUSSER, A CHILD OF HEIDEGGER? WHY?

Allow me, first, to emphasize what has already been said in the article’s abstract, based on the exchange of correspondence between Flusser and Leminski: “Which philosopher do you feel closest to (Heidegger)?” (Leminski, G. 2, p. 18). “Dear Friend... Heidegger is undoubtedly (with Husserl and Dilthey) the one I would most like to surpass and is, in this case, the most important” (Flusser, loc. cit., p. 22)<sup>1</sup>.

Certainly, the mere desire to ‘surpass’ Heidegger does not in itself make Flusser one of this children. Flusser needs to share some of the above features with his siblings. So, let’s see.

As soon as we delve into Flusser’s writings, we can see that the only of these features Flusser does not share with his siblings is (2). Because of his central belief that we are primarily intersubjective beings, i.e. the idea that the ‘I’ (the subject) is an abstraction of this intersubjectivity, i.e., that intersubjectivity has ontological primacy over subjectivity (as we will see later), Flusser believed himself to be many things – and not just a ‘German’<sup>2</sup> or a ‘Jew’. Indeed, by his own account, he was (we all are) a complex ontological fabric interwoven with different intersubjective threads: “a citizen of Prague,” “a Jew,” “a German,” “an Anglo-Saxon,” “*um paulistano*,” “a resident of Robion, and so on” (E. 2, p. 61f).

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<sup>1</sup> Many of Flusser’s works cited in this article are unpublished or out of print. And most of those that have been published once lack date. However, they can all be located in the Digital Collection of the Arquivo Vilém Flusser São Paulo. Readers need permission to log in, to be requested through the website. That said, in-text citations will refer to the digital folders where they are stored, followed by page numbers. E.g.: E. 2, p. 61 or M. 8, p. 24 indicate “Essays 2, p. 61” and “Magazines 8, p. 24” respectively. Full description of the manuscripts is found in the references section. And last but not least: my sincere thanks to the Vilém Flusser Archive in São Paulo.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, Flusser was not ‘German’; he was born in Prague. Thus, I used the gentilic here in a broader sense. That said, in those days to be a citizen of Prague meant to be immersed in German culture and German language. See Finger 2007 or Flusser 2007.

And that is the case because (putting one of my trump cards on the table) one of the fundamental axioms of Flusserian thought is simply this: we are, invariably, intersubjectivity. From birth, the baby is already intersubjectively intertwined with the mother and other caregivers in such a way that it excludes the possibility of a pre-existing ‘I’. The ego (of the baby) is formed from intersubjective threads. Hence, the ‘I’ is a thick shell that slowly forms around the intellect, covered (usually) by an ethical blanket of intersubjectivity (E. 5, p. 3)<sup>3</sup>.

Furthermore, a vital feature of Flusser’s thought is the idea that we must embrace these ontological, intersubjective threads in order to eventually overcome (*surpass*) them, into an ‘ethical substance’.

Thus – putting another trump card on the table –, in Flusserian glossary, *Surpassing* is a central concept; as such, Flusser’s desire to surpass Heidegger is not a mere academic delusion. But we will see this in more detail later. Let’s continue with the list of characteristics.

With regard to (1), perhaps because of the late contact with Heidegger’s work, Flusser’s relationship was never that of a ‘convinced Heideggerian’ – it was, from scratch, a relationship filled with “enthusiasm and hatred” (Flusser, 2002b, p. 200).

About (3), like many Heideggerians, Flusser reacted with hatred upon ‘discovering’ Heidegger’s (supposed) involvement with the Nazi regime<sup>4</sup>. But eventually, he would forgive Heidegger; an act that certainly enraged some of his Jewish friends in Brazil<sup>5</sup>.

Now, concerning tasks 4 and 5 go, Flusser’s desire to ‘surpass’ Heidegger essentially revolves around these tasks; that is, Flusser will try to surpass Heidegger by attempting to rethink the meaning of both: God and Ethics – after Auschwitz. It remains to be seen whether his attempts at the tasks above were enough for this.

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<sup>3</sup> See also Flusser (1966, p. 36f; 2012a, p. 59ff). See also Dias da Silva (2026).

<sup>4</sup> Note – it’s important –,when I say ‘supposed’ here, I don’t mean to minimize or deny the fact; I’m simply not (that) interested in this issue here (due to scope). An issue that, incidentally, has been discussed at length, from different perspectives. See, to cite just a few: Faye (2009); Payen (2023).

<sup>5</sup> In his autobiography, Flusser (2007, p. 33) writes: “It wasn’t the Nazis who killed our parents, we killed them, to save this disgusting body.” This statement repulsed some of his Jewish colleagues in São Paulo. One of these disgusted colleagues was Professor Milton Vargas, a former colleague of Flusser at the Brazilian Institute of Philosophy and at USP, who, after reading the statement, tried to summarize Flusser’s work in a single thesis: “We were Hitler’s whores.” Flusser discussed ‘the case’ in letters to his Jewish friend from São Paulo, the intellectual, lawyer, and also IBF member José Bueno. One thing is for sure: Vargas did not understand (nor did he want to understand) the basis of Flusser’s statement. A point I cannot address here, however. Cf. footnote 10.

First, though, we must highlight some bibliographical points – to the extent that these points will help us understand Flusser's *encounter* with Heidegger.

### 3 FLUSSER'S BIOGRAPHY: THE ESSENTIALS

Especially for the benefit of the reader unfamiliar with the work and life of the Czech-Brazilian thinker, it is important to highlight the essential moments of his biography.

Flusser was born on May 12, 1920, in Prague, into a family of Jewish intellectuals. His father, Gustav Flusser, was a mathematics and physics graduate and professor at Charles University in Prague. His mother, Melitta Basch, a Sephardic Jew, was a musician and singer.

In 1938, he completed two semesters of Philosophy at Charles University. But his studies were interrupted the following year, after the March 15, 1939 Nazi siege of Prague.

To save his Jewish skin, Flusser, along with his future wife's family, escaped from Prague.<sup>6</sup> Between 1939 and 1940, they remained in England, where Flusser tried to continue his philosophy studies at the London School of Economics. However, with the intensification of Nazi Blitz (the sustained aerial bombardments of London), in November 1940, Flusser and his future wife's family emigrated to Brazil – a three-month trip across the Atlantic.

They arrived in Rio de Janeiro in January 1941. Upon disembarking at the port of Rio, Flusser received the news that his father had been murdered by the Nazis. And that his mother, sister, grandparents, and uncles had been taken to concentration camps around Europe.

Later, in 1943, news would arrive of their executions. Flusser's grandparents and uncles were executed in Theresienstadt; his mother and sister in Auschwitz. By the time this *news* arrived, Flusser had been settled in São Paulo, where he lived for over 30 years. Justifiably, Flusser (2007, p. 54) says the first decade in São Paulo was infernal: "We were in Brazil as if we were on Mars". This was "the existential climate of the first years in São Paulo: the Nazi ovens on the horizon, suicide ahead, business by day, and philosophy by night." Of course, the war ended and Flusser

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, he was forced by his then-girlfriend, Edith. Initially, Flusser didn't want to abandon his family, who remained in Prague. It was Edith's power of persuasion (or love) that convinced him. And so Flusser left by train, along with Edith and her mother, for England, via Holland. However, because he didn't have a visa to enter England, Flusser was stopped and taken to prison. Edith and her mother were informed that if they didn't return with a visa to get Flusser out of jail in three days, he would be sent to a concentration camp. Essentially, it was Edith's determination that forced her father to return to Holland to save Flusser (Finger 2007).

did not commit suicide. But the daily business and the nightly philosophy (self-study) were still carried out, for many years, “with disgust” (p. 49-50).

But, ultimately, Flusser would find hope. In his words, he was saved by his “love for Philosophy and the possibility of readjustment in Brazil,” as a philosopher and writer. Through these activities, he writes, he would eventually discover what was “best in Brazilian intelligence, and these were his future friends” (p. 53). Among these future friends, it is worth mentioning: Miguel Reale, Milton Vargas, Vicente and Dora Ferreira da Silva, Guimarães Rosa, Mira Schendel, among others. It is not surprising that Flusser’s ‘dialogues’ with these figures each earned a chapter in his philosophical autobiography (Bodenlos, 2007)<sup>7</sup>.

The 1950s passed and Flusser began to adapt to the academic environment of São Paulo. By mid-1960s he had already published two of his main works: *Língua e Realidade* (1963) and *A História do Diabo* (1965), and was integrated into the Brazilian Institute of Philosophy (IBF).

Following these and other publications, mostly at the Brazilian Journal of Philosophy, as well as in his regular newspaper columns (*Folha* and *Estadão*), Flusser becomes a lecturer at the School of Arts, Design, and Communication of the Armando Alves Penteado Foundation (São Paulo) and at the Technological Institute of Aeronautics (São José dos Campos).

These activities consolidated Flusser as an important intellectual in Brazil. No surprise, years later, Miguel Reale (1992, p. 884)<sup>8</sup> would recognize that Flusser’s presence in Brazil had contributed significantly “to the development of an authentic Brazilian philosophy”.

However, by late 1960s Flusser’s golden years in Brazil were about to end.

With the tightening of the military dictatorship regime in Brazil during the period, and with pressure from colleagues at IBF (Miguel Reale, Milton Vargas, and others<sup>9</sup>) to choose – politically and ideologically – between the Marxist left (supposed communists) and the fascist military right (*déjà vu*), around 1972, Flusser opted for a third alternative: to abandon Brazil.

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<sup>7</sup> Flusser titled these chapters “Dialogues” – but they are really *monologs*; since they portray Flusser’s understanding of these authors.

<sup>8</sup> 1910-2006. Brazilian jurist, philosopher, politician, academic. Founder of the IBF. Despite their ideological differences, Flusser and Reale maintained their friendship and correspondence until Flusser’s death in 1991.

<sup>9</sup> In a letter dated August 1, 1969, to Milton Vargas, Flusser expresses his dissatisfaction with Vargas’s insistence that he (Flusser) should choose between the ‘Right’ (the military) or the ‘Left’ (the supposed communists). And Flusser replies: “Dear Friend, I am again resorting to the typewriter to clarify the subject of our discussion yesterday, which left me confused. I will divide the problem into two aspects. (a) Your insistence on the need to choose between ‘right’ and ‘left’, and (b) your choice of the right.” The letter is a true lesson (especially in the present predicament) on what ‘left’ and ‘right’ mean from the perspective of a victim of Nazism (Flusser, Correspondence, MV-3117, p. 8).

And, thus, Flusser and his wife, Edith, returned to Europe; eventually settling in Robion, southern France. There Flusser continued his intellectual activities.

By mid-1980 he had published his most famous work: *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie*<sup>10</sup>. The book was first published in German, and later translated into over twenty languages. The reception of his work, coupled with his growing production, led Flusser to consolidate his thought and influence in the leading media studies that marked that decade. And, thus, Flusser was gradually becoming a celebrity: a kind of Plato of the digital age. Or, as Alexander Galloway (2011) would say: “a lost gem – another [Herbert] McLuhan, only better”<sup>11</sup>. And, thus, Flusser is frequently invited to lecture at dozens of important conferences all over Europe (German, Austria, France, Romania, Czech Republic, and so on). In short, the couple spent more time traveling than at their home in Robion.

However, on November 27<sup>th</sup> 1991, returning home from a series of lectures in Prague (their first visit to their hometown since their escape in 1939), Flusser and Edith were involved in a car accident. Edith survived. Flusser died as a result of the accident.

Edith would die in 2014. But for more than 20 years after the accident, she faithfully worked as the intellectual heir to Flusser's *ouvrage*, editing and publishing his later writings.

Edith and Vilém ‘rest’ in the New Jewish Cemetery in Prague. And, on their tombstone, one can read (in Hebrew, Czech and Portuguese) the following epitaph: “We will never die, because only you and I are solitude, and for death.” And this phrase could well have been written by Flusser, since it very well abridges the vital ‘metaphysics of his Ethics of Alterity’<sup>12</sup>: “the ‘I’ [and the ‘Thou’] is a diffuse term, if it is a term at all” (2002b, p. 163). All that exists, therefore, as hinted above, is a ‘we’ – an intersubjectivity<sup>13</sup>.

Now that we have the essentials of Flusser's biography, we can try to understand the specifics of his relationship with Heidegger.

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<sup>10</sup> 1983. Published in English as: *Toward a Philosophy of Photography*.

<sup>11</sup> Galloway is a Professor of Art and Philosophy at State University of New York.

<sup>12</sup> Dias da Silva (2026).

<sup>13</sup> This is a summary of Flusser's biography as found at Biografia – Arquivo Vilém Flusser São Paulo For more autobiographical reading (Flusser, 2007). For Edith's side of the story (Finger, 2007). And for more comprehensive biographical accounts (Finger, Guldin and Krause, 2008; Batličková, 2010).

#### 4 FLUSSER'S LOVE-HATE 'ENCOUNTER' WITH HEIDEGGER

Unlike his *siblings*, Flusser had no direct contact with Heidegger. He hadn't even read Heidegger during his early philosophy studies in Prague. By his own admission, he would only come across Heidegger's writings in São Paulo, during his years of double disgust. And, in his words: "The first writings of Heidegger reached me in full and filled me with enthusiasm and hatred, in a hardly sustainable tension" (2002b, p. 200). The 'hatred' surely stems from knowledge of Heidegger's 'involvement' with Nazism. And, for readers of Heidegger, Flusser's enthusiasm hardly needs explanation. But out of respect for non-readers, a clarification is due. Essentially, Flusser's admiration for Heidegger revolves around his own understanding that Heidegger – like Flusser himself – would have indeed grasped the vital problem of Reality and of Thought: Language itself.

But, in Flusser's view, Heidegger never managed to penetrate these crucial issue genuinely; since, in his attempts to *solve* 'the fundamental problem', he only tries "desperately to create new words like *Zuhandensein*"... etc. But with these neologisms, insists Flusser: "Heidegger never manages to clearly glimpse the question. Hence the inauthenticity of the words created by this prophet of authenticity" (2012a, p. 106-107).

Interestingly, one of the ways in which Flusser tried to *surpass* Heidegger, consisted not in inventing neologisms, but, in fact, in giving new meanings to old terms. One – perhaps the most (in)famous – of the many old terms Flusser seeks to reframe is *Devil*.

Now, to be sure, in Flusser's work, 'Devil' has several meanings. However, its primary connotation is that of *Time* (or *History*) – and hence the title of Flusser's alleged attempt at Ethics<sup>14</sup>: *The History of the Devil*; which, according to Flusser himself, could well have been called simply 'history of history', or 'history of time', or, more concretely, 'history of progress'. After all: "The history of the devil [*time, history*] is the history of progress." Thus, "If humanity has progressed, it has done so thanks to him" – the Devil (*Time*) (2012b, p. 21-22).

But why the Devil *as* Time?

I admit, I've been racking my brain over this question since my undergraduate days. I do believe there are different ways to approach the issue. Thus, I'm in agreement with Guldin (2011)

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<sup>14</sup> According to Flusser himself (Ismael, 1965).



and Krause (2018, 2015) on this: Flusser's devil is a multifaced and ambiguous term. Flusser's devil is, to use Guldin's phrase: "a polyvalent symbol wearing different masks and permanently changing form" (2011, p. 11-12). Nevertheless, the 'mask' that interests us here is precisely the one that allows us to bring Flusser closer to Heidegger: the devil *as* Time.

In sum, so we may finally address the topic, Flusser posits the Devil *as* Time, as *Primordial Time* to be specific – and, therefore, distinct from the temporality of *Da-sein* –, exactly as an attempt to restore a primordial (metaphysical) distinction completely erased by Heidegger: that of the (old and enduring) difference between 'primordial Time' and temporality. Primordial Time, in Flusser's view, is a (elemental) movement "from zero to zero," i.e., a "flight from nothing to nothing," from chaos to chaos (2012b, p. 33). While the interval between one point and another is, simply put, *our time*, that is, temporality *per se*. Temporality *per se*, meaning 'our time', is finite and, hence, fundamentally related to the idea of being-towards-death. Thus in this Flusser clearly agrees with Heidegger.

What Flusser rejects is Heidegger's idea that temporality is equivalent to primordial time. This is the case because, for Flusser (and there goes another one of our trump cards), the ultimate understanding of *Da-sein* – that the temporality of time annihilates everything – "can only be overcome with faith in immortality" (E. 7, p. 69); the rest is 'idle talk'.

But *immortality* is a term that doesn't seem to interest the Heidegger of *Being and Time* (hereafter, BT). Indeed, in §42 Heidegger reminds us of a vital distinction in Seneca: the idea that God and man "differ in that God is immortal, man mortal." And Heidegger reminds us that the point here is that the only way *man* can fulfill *its* 'goodness', *its* destiny, is through "*care (cura)*"<sup>15</sup>. I.e.: "The *perfectio* of Man" – his capacity (and freedom) "to pursue his own potential (his design – *dem Entwurf* [please, remember this word]) is a result of 'care'" (1967, p. 199)<sup>16</sup>.

Just to be sure – it is important – Heidegger does not deny the possibility of *Da-sein*'s immortality. Only that, to him, "the ontological analysis of being-at-the-end" (as per BT) "does not

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<sup>15</sup> This opens the door to challenging the idea that Heidegger had no interest in ethics; since, for Heidegger, while "*Da-sein* is the pre-ontological understanding of Being," *Sorge* (the structure of care) is, in turn, the pre-ontological condition of *Da-sein* itself. Thus, after all, it seems that even in BT *Da-sein per se* is not a fundamental ground of much. I may, of course, be wrong. But the argument is based on a reading of §§§ 4, 20, & 39 together.

<sup>16</sup> Unless otherwise specified, references to *Being and Time* are from *Sein und Zeit*, specifically, from the Max Niemeyer Verlag 1967 edition. In this case, translations (and any errors) are my responsibility.

preempt any existential stance on death.” So, to the Heidegger of BT, “whether Da-sein ‘lives on’ or is even ‘enduring’, ‘immortal’” is, in this case, besides the point (p. 247-248).

That said, to Flusser this is not enough. Because, in repeated words: Da-sein’s ultimate self-understanding – that it is invariably a being-towards-death, a temporalizing temporality of time that annihilates everything (hence the urgency in the search for authenticity) – “can only be overcome with faith in immortality” (E. 7, p. 69); the rest is ‘idle talk’. So, it seems, Flusser tries to reestablish the (classic) distinction between ‘primordial time’ and temporality.

And he tries that throughout the aforementioned book (of the devil), in different ways. As, for example, when he writes: “The devil follows his own path,” resiliently, “and history sings the glory of his deeds.” What’s more: “The devil is possibly immortal, but certainly arose at a given moment. And, thus, he swims in the current of time, perhaps directs it, he is historical in the strict sense of the term” (2012b, p. 19).

On the other hand, Da-sein (described metaphorically here, as humanity in general): “is as close to or far from its goal as Adam and Eve” were before the Fall (p. 21-22).

*Fall* is indeed one of the many perspectives from which we can try to understand the distinction that Flusser seems to want to re-establish between *Time* and *temporality*. For the rest of the article we will therefore focus on this point. And we will do this, essentially, by working out a ‘distinction’ between two Heideggerian terms: *Geworfenheit* and *Verfallenheit*.

## **5 FLUSSER & HEIDEGGER: TIME AND TEMPORALITY (via Hegel)**

To begin an analysis of the proposed terms without first emphasizing some fundamental points about Flusser’s idea of ‘Fall’ would be, at the very least, reckless. Thus, here is the essentials we must keep in mind. Plainly, despite Flusser’s many criticisms of Hegel, the fact is that the starting point of his ontology is the same as Hegel’s: a metaphorical interpretation of the myth of the fall (Gen. 3). *Fallenness* is yet another ‘mask’ of the devil.

In this case, let’s first recall that the Swabian philosopher rejects the traditional interpretation of Genesis 3 – which sees the Fall – and the consequent expulsion from Paradise – as “the basis of an essential article of the creed, the doctrine of original sin in man and his consequent need for help” or salvation. No. For Hegel (2008), Spirit, *as* ‘Man’, is primarily a divided thing, a disunity – with Nature and with itself. And it is precisely this disunion that the

myth of the Fall portrays: “The Mosaic legend of the Fall of Man has preserved an ancient picture representing the origin and consequences of this disunion.” However: “After a more detailed inspection of the story of the fall, we discover... that it exemplifies [in fact] the universal influence of [the development of] knowledge on spiritual life” (p. 45).

Thus, the Fall *is not* a fall from a state of authenticity, a divine state of the soul, to a state of sin. Especially because, for Hegel (2001), before the Fall, human beings weren’t even truly human beings. ‘Paradise’ was, at best, more like a zoo: “Paradise is a park where only brutes, and not men, can remain. For the brute is one with God only implicitly [not consciously]. Only the Spirit of Man has a self-conscious existence” (p. 340). So, humanity has indeed fallen... because it needed to become Spirit. It needed, so to speak, to become one with God consciously. But this *Fall* is not something that happened at a given moment in history. No!

Being human i.e., being in a human ‘body’ doesn’t automatically turn that being into Spirit – to reiterate: Spirit *must become* Spirit; this is the eternal myth of man. Said differently; to be human is to be a fall. ‘Man’ is always at the point of transition, from Nature to Spirit. Thus, insists Hegel: The Fall: “the *eternal Mythos of Man* – is, in fact, the very transition by which he becomes man”, “Spirit,” or self-consciousness; and through which we become ‘like the gods’, capable of distinguishing between good and evil.

To cut a long story short, Flusser accepts Hegel’s metaphorical principle of the Fall, but rejects the interpretations of progress of Spirit that led Hegel to a Historical Theodicy. Starting from the idea of the ontological ‘necessity’ of the Fall, so that Spirit can become Spirit in fact, Hegel concludes, as Glenn Magee (2010, p. 104) rightly puts it: that “the History of the World is the history of the progressive conquest of human self-consciousness, which is simultaneously the realization of freedom” and rationality. In other words: the History of the World and the History of Geist’s progress towards the ever-widening realization of Rational Freedom. And, thus, World History is nothing but God’s journey on Earth. Consequently, we must understand, writes Hegel (2001, p. 477):

That the History of the World, with all the changing scenes that its annals present, is this process of development and realization of the Spirit – this is the true Theodicy, the justification of God in History. Only this vision can reconcile the Spirit with the History of the World – that is, that what has happened, and is happening every day, is not only not “Godless,” but is, in fact, essentially His Work.

It is no coincidence that in Hegel's version of the story, the Serpent is acquitted. After all, the Serpent did not lie. It said: "You will certainly not die [if you eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden];" in fact: "when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:2-5). Hegel stresses that the promise made by the Serpent was not only fulfilled, but is aligned with God's own declaration: "Behold, [humanity] is now one of us" (Gen. 22). In Hegel's (2001, p. 341) words: "God confirms the words of the Serpent. Implicitly and explicitly, then, we have the truth, that man through Spirit – through cognition of the Universal and the Particular – comprehends God Himself".

In any case, let us keep this in mind: whatever purpose *Geist* may have for Hegel, which, as seen, boils down to this: 'revealing' the Absolute, little by little, in an ever wider and more rational way (in History), the 'devil' serves Flusser to propose quite the opposite: 'after the fall', what we see is not a revealing, but a hiding of Spirit. To be sure, to Flusser, the 'Devil' falls (much like Da-sein). Indeed, 'Devil' and Da-sein are both *Geworfenheit* – *things* tossed about in the current of Time. In Flusser's (metaphorical) words (p. 31):

the Lord tore away a piece of "being itself," of "pure being," to plunge it into the current of time. And this current of time alters pure being, makes it phenomenal, because it drags it along and subjects it to successive modifications. And it is in this sense that "heavens and earth" were created, and it is in this sense that we can conceive the meaning of the [first] phrase [of Genesis] – "In the beginning, the Lord created the heavens and the earth".

In simple terms, then: for Hegel, History is the movement of Spirit on Earth (and a gift of the divine providence; for Flusser, it is nothing but "the devil's playground" (p. 43).

Therefore, it is not surprising to read Flusser say that: "Hegelian philosophy [*of history* and *of right* in particular] is, in fact, a glorification of the devil" (p. 131).

That said, here is, in Flusser's eyes, Da-sein's vital karma: 'Devil' – i.e. Primordial Time – is that which cannot be properly defined; but neither can it be annihilated or denied – without the risk of "annihilating ourselves and the supposed author of the devil, God" (p. 211).

Ultimately, what is at stake in Flusser's profane reinterpretation of Gen. 1 and Gen. 3 (the creation story and the fall story) are three assumptions:

- (1) my temporality differs fundamentally, drastically, from the encompassing concept of Primordial Time;

(2) nothing that exists (as effective reality – including both the devil and Da-sein, *Time* and *temporality*) has a truly free cause (the devil and Da-sein are therefore shackled); and, thus,

(3) true freedom, relevant to philosophy, is conditioned, determined, limited by the only question about freedom that makes any sense to be posed: ‘Free for what?’

We will return to this point later on, as we approach a conclusion.

But, in summary – and this is what really matters here (so we may slowly leave Hegel behind and concentrate on Heidegger) –, to Flusser there is, as already hinted above, a radical distinction between *Devil* and Da-sein, between Time and temporality: “The devil follows his path, and history sings the glory of his deeds. Humanity [on the other hand] is as close to or far from its goal as Adam and Eve were, before and after the Fall” (p. 21-22).

This is a point that can be clarified through a discussion of the distinction between *Geworfenheit* and *Verfallenheit*.

## **GEWORFENHEIT AND VERFALLENHEIT**

In BT, Heidegger emphasizes the point that the fundamental aspect of Dasein is to be temporal. In §29, for one, he writes: “The character of being [Dasein], veiled in its origin and destination, but all the more revealed in itself, in that it is ‘there’ [already]”, thrown into time, and “we call the thrownness of this being into its being-there, in such a way that it is there as being-in-the-world” (1967, p. 135). ‘Thrown-into-time’ is another name for *Geworfenheit*.

To be a Da-sein means to be *Geworfenheit*. For, as Michael Inwood (1999) points out: “*Geworfenheit* is the central characteristic of Da-sein itself” (p. 218). To be a Da-sein means to be thrown into the *Da*, into the ‘there’ of *Sein* (Being). There is no other mode of being for Da-sein prior to *Geworfenheit*. And this, as we have seen, is in accordance with Flusser’s (and Hegel’s) view that ‘before the fall’ there was no *humanity*, no proper existence, Da-sein – consciousness of its own *being-there* as existence. And this is what Flusser (and Hegel) means by *temporality* and *fallenness*. I already find myself *there*, in the *Da*, of *Sein*, as a finitude, a temporality. It is in this finitude that I discover myself, always. Even in a broad sense, as Hegel employs the term *Dasein* (any determinate thing – a stone, a house, a mountain, a horse), to be a *Dasein* means to be temporal (and, obviously, spatial).

So, *Geworfenheit* indicates a past and a future of Being. While the present is the nodal moment that makes past and future intelligible. However, and this is the crucial point, this intelligibility is exclusive to human Da-sein. The critical difference between Da-sein and any other *Dasein* is, in this sense, solely this: things (*Daseine*) never reach the intelligibility of their own temporality (death): things do not fall; they do not die. They just appear and disappear in Time. Only Da-sein knows itself to be for death. Only Da-sein knows it will disappear.

In this case, Da-sein must face its most unique feature: its double condemnation: (1) Da-sein is condemned to temporality *per se* (like any other *Dasein*), and (2) it is condemned to find for meaning for this temporality. Now that's indeed a 'privilege' of Da-sein.

Heidegger seems aware of this. He even makes a distinction between *Geworfenheit* and *Verfallenheit* (fall) to highlight the differences. *Geworfenheit*, as said, applies to everything; while *Verfallenheit* concerns only Da-sein. Things, as said, *do not fall* – i.e., they only occur in Time. But, of course, as Inwood (1999) rightly reminds us, things also do not philosophize. Simply because: “A non-fallen Dasein cannot do philosophy” (p. 218)

Or, more poetically, in the words of Arnaldo Antunes (2000, p. 9): “Things have weight, mass, volume, size, time, form, color, position, texture, duration, density, smell, value, consciousness, depth, contour, temperature, function, appearance, price, destiny, age, meaning”... but things “have no peace”. And, obviously, neither can things experience *disgust, anguish, unease, nausea*. All that is the privilege of Spirit.

Therefore, in the words of Flusser: only Da-sein can feel “spiritual vertigo (and without which there is no philosophical speculation)” (E. 9, p. 48).

Of course, for Heidegger, ‘Fall’ (*Verfallenheit*) is a form of inauthenticity. In this case, it indicates precisely the opposite of ‘fall’ in the terms described so far (for Hegel, Flusser, and Inwood). For them, as we have seen, *Fall* is a precondition for the possibility of self-consciousness. Therefore, to say that Da-sein falls, in Heideggerian terms, is to point to *inauthenticity*, i.e., is to say that Da-sein allows itself to be seduced by everyday life, by the worldliness of the world, and thus distances itself from its possibility of authenticity<sup>17</sup>.

That said, *nausea, anguish, disgust*, etc., are recurring themes in almost all (if not all) existentialist philosophies. But Flusser would agree with Inwood (1999, p. 218) on this: “it does

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<sup>17</sup> Dahlstrom (2011); Buren (2005).

not follow that falling (*Verfallenheit*) is a bad thing” So, Flusser’s basic divergence with (French) existentialism lies in saying that anguish, disgust, and “the experience of the absurdity” of human existence is fundamentally “to say nothing” (2012b, p. 153).

This is the case because, for Flusser, as discussed in the sections above, neither the ‘I’ nor the ‘Thou’ exist in isolation. We are, fundamentally, intersubjective beings. And disgust, absurdity, anguish, etc. (i.e., as the existentialists postulate), for Flusser, arise only when the dense blanket of intersubjectivity is removed. In Flusser’s flowery words: disgust, absurdity (etc.) only arises “from the context from which the dense blanket of intersubjective relations was removed”... and therefore the “dense ethical blanket” was removed (E. 5, p. 3).

To Flusser, reality is intersubjectivity (effective reality *per se*) and, simultaneously, ethical reality. Disgust, anguish, etc., are already the result of idle chatter (*Gerede*). Because, for Flusser, idle talk relativizes everything: including our fundamental understanding of the distinction between good and evil. In his words: “We all have something we call *consciousness of good and evil*.” And, generally, we “take” this consciousness “for absolute” (2012b, p. 145).

That said, one of the many masks of the devil is to relativize this consciousness, transferring it to ephemeral things such as soil, nation, society, politics, etc., i.e., things without “eternal value” (Flusser, 2007, p. 296).

Perhaps a good (existentialist) example of the point Flusser attempts to make here is, perhaps, the predicament of the anguished historian, Antoine Roquentin – a character in Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialist novel *Nausea* (2015).

Roquentin is the fatal realization of the ultimate temporality and facticity of things: that “Every being is born without reason, prolongs itself through weakness, and dies by chance” (p. 161). Roquentin arrives at this realization through banal acts, such as holding a small stone in his hands. The facticity of the stone passes into Roquentin’s body and mind. In the absurdity of the facticity of things, Roquentin also discovers, in his own words: that he is, that he exists, but, he laments: “I am a thing, I exist, I think, therefore I am shaken, I am,” in fact, “I-am”... but “existence is a fallen fall... existence is an imperfection” (p. 124).

To Flusser, as seen, this type of predicament arises from *idle talk* – the removal of the blanket of intersubjectivity – and this relativizes ethics itself and *affective responsibility*. Roquentin himself, curiously, confesses to the removal of his ethical/intersubjective blanket: “My past is

dead... I am alone on this white street lined with gardens. Alone and free. But this Freedom is somewhat like death” (p. 188). That is: Roquentin confuses the question ‘Free *from* what?’ with the question ‘Free *for* what?’ Indeed, in Flusser’s eyes, he is not even capable of asking the second question; he is truly buried under tons of existential disgust.

According to Flusser, one could say that Roquentin also confuses *Geworfenheit* with *Verfallenheit*. Or rather, he confuses both *Geworfenheit* (his own and that of the stone) with *Verfallenheit*. In any case, for Flusser, *Verfallenheit* (Fall) ultimately points to an ethical dimension. And the forgetting of this fundamental character of *Verfallenheit* (including by Heidegger, given the absence of ethics in his work) is another name for *Gerede* (idle talk). Of course, in BT, Heidegger concludes that Being *is* Time. To be human means to exist temporally, in the interval between birth and death. *Being is time*; and *time is finite* – it ends with death. In Heidegger’s own words: “The existential-ontological constitution of the totality of Da-sein is grounded in temporality” (1967, p. 437).

The crucial issue is that, at least “since Aristotle,” this ‘primordial temporality’ has been repeatedly misinterpreted. And, of course, Hegel is, for Heidegger, one of the many authors of these misinterpretations of primordial temporality (p. 435). Specifically, the problem is the counting of time from a perception of *nows*. In this case, Time (*Zeit*) is what we experience in the passing of these *nows*, so to speak: “Time is what is ‘counted’, i.e., it is what is expressed and what we have in mind... when the traveling hand [of the clock] ... moves” (p. 421).

In the case of Hegel, in particular, Heidegger continues, in this ‘passing of the hours’, “Time [must be seen as] the negative unity of ‘Being-outside-of-itself’” – in this case, it is the becoming of something (any Dasein) in Time. And this leads us to believe in a “transition from Being to Nothingness and from Nothingness to Being” (p. 429).

Thus, for Heidegger, Hegel correctly intuitively that ‘Time’ *is* ‘Becoming’.

However, from here, Heidegger insists, Hegel goes on to interpret “this becoming in an ‘abstract’ sense, which goes far beyond the representation of the ‘flow’ of time,” that is, of primordial time – Da-sein. For Hegel, continues Heidegger: “‘Spirit’ does not fall into time, but exists as the original temporalization of temporality” (p. 436).

All this only confirms what we have already said above: that Flusser follows Hegel’s fundamental intuition: that there is a clear distinction between Time and temporality. Something



that, of course, Heidegger does not accept. To him there is only one original mode of temporalization of temporality: Da-sein itself.

Consequently, in BT, Heidegger does not accept this distinction, present in both Hegel and Flusser, between Time and temporality – and, therefore, he seeks to overcome it, as we have seen, essentially relating primordial Time solely and exclusively to Da-sein. As Da-sein, I do not experience time abstractly or separately... ‘I am Time’... i.e., Da-sein *is* Time; Time *is* Da-sein. This, of course, does not prevent Heidegger from posing subsequent vital questions. I.e.: of problematizing the ‘final’ point of BT (as we know it, § 81 and 82).

Hence, the various (unanswered) questions in the last paragraph of BT.

Thus, after recognizing that, after all a thorough analysis, “Something like ‘Being’ was revealed in the understanding of Being, which as understanding, belongs to Da-sein [existing existence].” And this a priori, “albeit non-conceptual” notion of Being allows us “to relate to beings, both to those encountered within the world and to [ourselves] as existing.”

But... wonders Heidegger: “How is [this] revealing understanding of Being even possible in terms of existence [Da-sein]?” And: “Can this question find its answer in a [mere] return to the original state of the being that understands existence [i.e., the being of Da-sein]?” That is: “Is the existential-ontological constitution of the totality of Da-sein itself grounded in temporality?” If so, “How is this mode of temporality to be interpreted?” OR... “Does time reveal itself to be the horizon of Being?”... including, of course, the being of Da-sein? If that is the case: “Is there a path from original time [Da-sein itself] to the meaning of Being [*qua* Being]?” (1967, p. 437).

Once again, these questions are not answered in BT. And we already know why: the work was not completed as planned. It is also important to note that, decades later, Heidegger would acknowledge: “Perhaps the fundamental flaw of the book *Being and Time* was that it ventured too far ahead, too soon” (1982, p. 7).

## ONE CONCLUSION

Flusser would surely agree with Heidegger on several of these key points. Especially the ones regarding the urgency of the questions raised in the last paragraph of BT. However, Flusser shows little interest in the Heideggerian notion of primordial temporality: i.e., Time is Da-sein; Da-

sein is Time. Yes, for Flusser, Da-sein has only one mode of being: *Geworfenheit*. Therefore, Da-sein is invariably a being-towards-death.

However, Flusser's central question here is, it seems, simpler. 'How do I know that I am destined for death?' That is to say: *Why* do we bother ourselves with the question of finitude? If everything hinges fundamental around Da-sein, the temporalizing temporality itself, why bother? Death and, perhaps, chaos, would explain everything. Hence, Flusser's central 'metaphysical' postulate in this context (already formulated above): the ultimate comprehension that we are invariably beings-towards-death, hence, that the temporalizing temporality of time annihilates everything – "can only be overcome with faith in immortality" (E. 7, p. 69); the rest is 'idle talk'.

Surest thing: "Undoubtedly: we die." And, supposedly, we are the only being that knows itself to be-towards-death. And, insists Flusser, we know this in three essential ways. We know that for "objective reasons":

- (i) "through the infirmity of the organs of our body" and
- (ii) "by analogy" with the other who dies. But, more fundamentally, we know this
- (iii) "thanks to an immediate [peculiar type of] knowledge; namely: through the urgency with which we experience every instant" of our existence (M. 8, p. 24).

Moreover, it is in this urgency – whose fundamental characteristic is not only knowing oneself to be-towards-death, but the need for the "negation of the [chaotic] world that" surrounds us, i.e., we are creatures that simply do not accept "the given" (the *gift*, Nature); and, apparently, this is exactly where human dignity lies (p. 25). This instant knowledge and the urgency with which we experience every instant of our existence, still according to Flusser, only makes sense "with faith in immortality" (E. 7, p. 69).

In other words, while for the Heidegger of BT the question of the temporalizing temporality of Da-sein seems sufficient (again, I believe, because BT was not completed), and serves as its ontological foundation, Flusser starts from another principle. Da-sein, in itself, i.e., as and 'I' and as a 'Thou', is not the foundation of (or for) anything; it is, at best, an abstraction; at worst, an abyss, a disgust, an anguish.

Consequently, the fundamental question for Flusser is: What do I do with the knowledge that I am being-towards-death? For Flusser, as we have seen, this is a question that can be better

answered by considering the only question about freedom that makes any sense: *Free for what?* A fundamentally ethical question.

In short: For Flusser, I exist only in intersubjectivity... and I will exist, eternally, only in intersubjectivity. The rest is *idle talk*. And Flusser takes this postulate to its extreme formulation, as he rejects the myth of the death of God: “For us, God did not die: He lives in the other” (2007, p. 223). And, hence, the only metaphysical imperative that truly matters to Flusser: “Love your other as yourself, the rest is hypocrisy.” And here, from the outset, Flusser departs from the majority of his siblings... and certainly from his father as he states: “I am Christian in that sense.” And “the older I get, the more it seems to me that this is the true distinction” between Judaism and Christianity... and not the figure of “Christ” itself. “[Christ] is merely the consequence of the religious internalization [of that fundamental Jewish commandment].” Love your other as yourself, the rest is hypocrisy” (E. 17, p. 31-42).

We could reverse Flusser’s question, and ask: What do I do with this knowledge? And, in this dialectical movement, we could, possibly, arrive nowhere. But, even in this, we would be, in Flusser’s view, in the verge of surpassing Heidegger in some way, since by confronting Flusser’s assertion, we would surely be placing ourselves in direct dialogue with our Judeo-Christian tradition... and not just with the Greeks, as Heidegger seemed to have wanted.

To explain.

To Flusser, all reality always appears, exclusively, in the form of language – of different languages, to be more precise; thus, “there is no reality prior to languages, there is no Self prior to languages, and there is no language prior to language.” Paraphrasing John the Apostle, for Flusser, in the beginning, the Logos was the possibility of Being... as the possibility of itself. And, because it is always (as long as it is still towards death) a possibility (unfinished), because it is invariably a process (project, *Entwurf*), Spirit (Da-sein) converses in order to become what it should be. “I am only truly myself because I agree with others, conversing – we are conversing” (Flusser, 1966, p. 36-37).

Indeed, *Conversation*, the necessity of dialogue, becomes so vital for Flusser that Philosophy itself cannot be done without the intersubjectivity imperative. Philosophizing becomes a dialogical act. Hence, Flusser postulate: “Let us listen to the sources of our conversation, let us listen to the proper names as they whisper within us, and let us converse with them.” Just as there

is no ‘I’ or ‘Thou’ prior to language, and, consequently, the realization of the existential project requires intersubjectivity, conversation (we are conversing), the incessant mindfulness of being and thinking – Philosophy itself, born from spiritual vertigo – requires a dialogue with the past. But not only with Heidegger’s Greeks. On its path towards mindfulness and incessant attention, Da-sein must converse with all the “initiators of our great banquet, the mythical figures” of Orpheus, Abraham, Jacob, Sisyphus, Inanna, Buddha, Moses, Saul, etc., for these “proper names call us to the sacrifice that they themselves initiated.” It is “from the conversation that the final sacrifice can occur” (2011, p. 120).

And what ‘final sacrifice’ is this?

In one word: *Transcension*... because, in the end, insists Flusser, none of this has eternal value. Therefore, let us listen to these voices without fanaticism (i.e., let us accept them and listen to them in order to, in the end, transcend them). Because, again, to Flusser: everything is (must be) “*Überholt*, [i.e.], overcome and surpassed” (2012a, p. 73).

This includes, of course, overcoming our own sources. This is, I believe, a reasonable interpretation of Flusser’s desire to surpass Heidegger. However, this ‘surpassing’, I insist, is primarily an ethical task; since, for Flusser, it occurs in intersubjectivity, in conversation: and conversation is, to Flusser, the field of our affective responsibilities.

But Leminski understood this much. Indeed, in the same letter of 01/06/64, he ventures an alliterative: *Conversamos/conversemos/conversumos/conversomos*” (G. 2, p. 18)<sup>18</sup>.

Flusser likes the ‘verse’ and is curious: “A question: does *conversumos* come from *sumo* [juice, essence] or *sumir* [disappear] or both?” (p. 22). Leminski answers: “*conversumos* comes from *sumos*” – which, in Portuguese, ambiguously, can also mean *summit*, *peak*, *exalted*, *input*, *juice* (the liquid contained in a fruit), *essence*, etc.

But Flusser’s irony and skeptical generosity escaped Leminski’s sagacity. Flusser’s question – “Does *conversumos* come from *sumo* or *sumir*?” – has a fundamental ‘ethical’ drive; for, as we have seen, in conversation, in ethical intersubjectivity, the abstracted ‘I’ disappears, transforms itself, becomes other, before the Other (God); a topic that, were we to pursue it any

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<sup>18</sup>A play on words that, as the conversation with Leminski goes on, will make more sense to a Portuguese-speaking reader. In essence, it means: *we are conversing*. But translating it would make no sense. I leave it, thus, as it is.

further, would force us to confront Flusser with some of his ‘siblings’, especially Karl Löwith and Hannah Arendt – therefore, it is a topic best left for another conversation.

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