

# The Dramaturgy of Flusser

## *A Dramaturgia de Flusser*

LUCRÉCIA D'ALESSIO FERRARA <sup>a</sup>

Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP), Graduate Program in Communication and Semiotics. São Paulo – SP, Brazil

### ABSTRACT

This study examines *The History of the Devil* and analyzes how the text unfolds as a dramatic scene, depicting a peculiar connection with reality, seemingly orchestrated by sin under the guidance of the devil. This study is structured into three sections titled “Ways of Thinking,” “Ways of Saying,” and “Ways of Understanding.” It aims to analyze how Flusser employs analogies and allegories to establish a connection between fiction and the contemporary world in its exercises of power and trivialization of all states of exception.

**Keywords:** Dramaturgy, analogy, allegory, communication, politics

<sup>a</sup> Full professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo (FAU-USP) and full professor of the Graduate Program in Communication and Semiotics at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP). Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4727-9817>. E-mail: [lucreciadalessioferrara@gmail.com](mailto:lucreciadalessioferrara@gmail.com)

### RESUMO

Este trabalho está voltado para o estudo de *A História do Diabo* e observa que o texto se desenvolve como cena dramática, em estranha relação com a realidade, supostamente encenada pelo pecado sob a direção do diabo. O artigo divide-se em três partes nomeadas como: Formas de Pensar, Formas de Dizer e Formas de Entender, e tem em vista estudar o modo como Flusser utiliza analogias e alegorias para aproximar a ficção da obra e o próprio contemporâneo nos seus exercícios de poder e de banalização de todos os estados de exceção.

**Palavras-chave:** Dramaturgia, analogia, alegoria, comunicação, política

## WAYS OF THINKING

The devil created the heavens to create the earth. And he created Earth, to create life. He created life, to create humanity. He created humanity, to create the human spirit; words: the Earth is the stage for sin. (Flusser, 2005, p. 45)

So, let us muster all our courage as we raise the curtain on the scene of life, the scene in which our personal drama unfolds. (Flusser, 2005, p. 52)

Nothing further needs to be added to these brief notes... other than my opinion on the issue at hand: I believe that the contemporary world can be replicated, even in the theater, provided it is perceived as a world susceptible to change. (Brecht, 1978, p. 7)

**M**ANY CLAIM THAT we will not be able to transcend our time or its scenic structure without substantial changes. However, our maladies are not that of health; but of the soul, which requires that we present ourselves to the world in a different manner. Overcoming the illness of the soul requires producing reflections, or by any other name, something which means knowledge through experience: in this sense, every illness is a category of analysis. It requires, for example, surpassing the mere description and lack of commitment to an author's work. This demands overcoming the monograph on an author, which is solely focused on their ideas and suggestions. In order to transcend the author, it is necessary to explore the work and its way of production. This can be a gruesome task whereby, in dialogue, but not without confrontation, the author questions the reader and makes them pause to review or reevaluate what seems routine and ordinary. All illness supposes displacement of the seemingly ordinary, a disruption in the routine or a need to stop, in order to observe the before and after; every illness implies a before and an after, a conference of time in time. Temporality is inherent to every illness.

However, I recommend prudence in this task. To this end, I endeavor to comprehend the ideas of Flusser by focusing on a specific piece of his writing, which potentially encapsulates the essence of his entire body of work. It is *The History of the Devil*, studied, not only in terms of its exclusive ways of knowing how to think, say and understand. Conversely, in the course of this study, I am confronted with passages from *Dúvida* (Doubt) and a text from a conference entitled *Artificio, Artefato, Artimanha* (Artifice, Artifact, Gambit).

In *The History of the Devil*, the essential concept of the text is the history set in motion by the devil; just as science is through doubt; and life, by the

way of thinking. Thinking is a perilous endeavor which requires audacity, an adventurous spirit and, above all, a sense of humor. In a joyful manner, Flusser introduces us to his fundamental concept of history, accompanied by other equally intriguing concepts: science; life; philosophy, as a method contemplating the need to dominate the world; art, as a surface abstracted from volume, or the other technical surface that replaces the volumetric weight of three-dimensional space, replacing it with the technical two-dimensional one, comprised of programmed surfaces marked by points and numbers. Among all these concepts, the most dangerous is philosophy, which posits it is possible to dominate life through the illusion of intellectual creation. However, these elaborations are nothing more than concepts, often detached from the actual learning experience.

Nevertheless, these findings are abstract concepts that occupy Flusser's reflections. Deleuze & Guattari (1992, p. 25) argue that concepts are abstractions, agitated by unconventional actions intended for giving physical form to intellectual labor. In doing so, they convert it into a scene that, similar to theatrical fiction, transcends the abstraction and provides a framework for comprehending history, life, art, technique, and philosophy. The two aforementioned philosophers offer insights into Flusser's thought and, most importantly, his methodology. Flusser's essays subtly conceal his fear or contempt for academia and, to some extent, philosophy. He presents philosophy as a provocative act, a fictional performance which offers an alternative perspective on reality. This perspective may come from someone detached from the constraints of time, or one overwhelmed by an excessive amount of time. This fictional approach disrupts the monotonous rhythm of everyday life, mirroring our attempts to make it possible to engage with the contemporary world.

Thus, *The History of the Devil* is a provocative piece which invites us to revisit the concept of history that consistently emerges in the author's work, albeit with fresh connotations. To fully grasp the contents of *The History of the Devil*, one must comprehend Flusser's approach to constructing the concept of history, as well as his method for transcending abstraction. This understanding is crucial to reexamine history in its concrete form and implications. It is imperative to comprehend the process by which a thought is translated into action, rendering it tangible and capable of being present and actively developed. It is necessary to understand how history transforms into a fictitious character that may be believed, and how such character, laden with ideological significance, masquerades as a mode of thinking. The author's use of irony and cheerfulness in his writing allows him to playfully engage with philosophy, while evading the hermetic nature of the concept. It is conceivable that Flusser is attempting to play the

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role of a philosopher; however, he acquired this skill by engaging in a fictional game with the devil, his significant collaborator.

This playful approach to thinking eliminates the temptation of contemplating the tone of the narrative presented in *The History of the Devil*; rather, it suffices to understand the fundamental basis of the fictional story crafted by the devil, as seen by Flusser. Hence, the cardinal premise of the game is that we can either have fiction taken inside out, as a narrative that resembles reality, or we can have reality disguised as fiction. This prompts us to consider philosophy from a fictitious standpoint, and we come to the realization that the devil is a character (Deleuze & Guattari, 1992, p. 81) who manipulates concepts. The devil is an angel who toys with the terminology used by philosophers. Consequently, his initial historical action involves attempting to deconstruct concepts.

*The History of the Devil* comprises a set of concepts that are neither self-explanatory nor self-referential. These notions do not present themselves to us directly; rather, we must carefully consider the specific elements that constitute them as fictional concepts, yet presented as if they were real. Flusser proposes a philosophical perspective that can be understood by examining its causes and consequences. Nevertheless, this is not the position chosen by this author. In order to transcend this cause-and-effect linearity, it is imperative to learn, with Flusser, how to navigate transversal paths that stem from the arts of the devil, while encompassing historical writing. The central argument of this passage is referred to as *sin*. The devil and sins serve as characters that dramatize the history and are featured in a chapter written by Flusser, the dramaturgist.

History, as a concept, is fundamentally inquiry. It requires a response, yet its solution can be found in the interplay of ideas and concepts. Concepts interact and the devil hones and refines our play, enabling us to joyfully engage with concepts. *The History of the Devil* teaches us to play with history; the initial lesson consists of learning to manipulate concepts.

Once formulated, concepts are self-contained and hermetic, therefore, they present themselves as enigmas to be deciphered. This process of unraveling them becomes another aspect of the endeavor we are encouraged to undertake, until we realize that we can learn to construct concepts and engage in playful exploration with them. However, this can occasionally lead to confusion and misunderstandings, as concepts are not inherently peaceful and orderly. On the contrary, they tend to be contentious and thought-provoking, as they are pandemic and challenging. *The History of the Devil* jests with concepts which involve all the principles created and explored by Flusser, and enumerating, adopting and employing such notions is not an easy task. Let us examine the concepts created and selected by Flusser, but which were inspired by the devil.

The core concept is that of history, which, being linear, is subjugated by time: “I will refer to anything that strives to transcend time as divine influence. I will call diabolical influence anything that contributes to the preservation of the world in time” (Flusser, 2005, p. 23)

This exercise examines the opposition between the historical concept of linear time and the idea of eternity as the transcendence of time. It also highlights the opposition between the temporal nature of the devil and the eternal nature of God. These oppositions establish a parameter that distinguishes and defines different concepts, providing the domain of ideas its vital axis: polarization, which will serve as the foundation of the cultural division of time into before and after. Time and eternity are thus separated, linear history and the story that is told, man and beast, God and the devil.

The first lesson in this game laid out by Flusser involves closely examining the disconnection that condemned Adam and Eve to sin. This condemnation implies that sin influences reasoning, dictated by a historical perspective that associates guilt with sin in the Western world. Despite not being academic in nature, Flusser explores a vital concept that is relevant to the Western world, which is heavily influenced by linear time. Through this exploration, the author assumes his philosophical stance. However, due to his aversion to academia, he playfully engages in this practice, thus granting himself the freedom to convert history into fiction, a setting devoid of temporal or spatial constraints. This is the game Flusser learns from the devil, and both of them educate us on how to engage in sinful activities.

In the game with linear history, traditional sins, counted as seven, change names:

Pride is self-awareness, Avarice is economy. Lust is the innate drive/affirmation of life. Gluttony is an improvement in the standard of living, Envy is the pursuit of social justice and political freedom, Anger is the refusal to accept the limitations imposed to human volition; therefore, dignity. Sloth or sadness is the stage reached by the serene contemplation of philosophy. (Flusser, 2005, p. 25)

This is the first lesson taught by the devil; that changing a name means translating what seems obscure and abstract. By changing the name meaning is trivialized and ultimately becomes common and, in this simplified iteration; states everything, without conceptualizing anything. Changing a name renders sin trivial and, as such, its acceptance is irrelevant. When translated, sin is devoid of guilt and transcends the original sin of Adam and Eve, as well as the deadly sins that are analogous to it. Translating, seen as altering names,

results in the transformation of sin into routine and diminishes its abstract and conceptual significance. This process, known as transduction, reverses the intended meaning of the translated term and renders the original meaning trivial. Moreover, altering a name entails altering historic circumstances, resulting in the conversion of real life into a work of fiction which, through the act of recording history, turns it into a dramatic spectacle. It portrays sin as a trivialized counterpart of the devil. Therefore, Flusser is a dramaturgist who transforms sin into a matrix concept, playing a crucial role in shaping the history of the west, a history authored by the devil.

In this sense, Flusser challenges us to deal with concepts, yet he also leads us to believe that we are actively involved with history, time, God and the devil. We learn the diabolical art of being quasi-gods and come to believe that we are the creators of nature, technology, art, history and steer the destiny of the world. This suggests that humans are free from sin, as we possess the ability to create like deities. This is the first lesson of the devil, teaching us how to manipulate concepts, through wickedness. For the devil, sin is the main concept and path of history.

### WAYS OF SAYING

When translating, one might consider that the devil is not as hideous as often believed. In fact, the devil can be seen as similar to his counterpart in the process of creating nature, the planet, and humanity. The devil can be seen as similar to God in that both are creators. However, the devil's approach to creation is characterized by making it seem trivial and comical, deviating from its historical significance. The devil is portrayed as the force that operates within the phenomenal world to sustain it; and prevent it from dissolution and being saved; "from the perspective of the pure Being, the "divine" is a creative force while the "devil" represents annihilation. (Flusser, 2005, p. 23)

Amidst this movement of ideas, Flusser's inclination towards a theological perspective that aligns closely with scholasticism becomes evident. However, there is a distinction in Flusser's view, as he sees all theology as an ironic expression of the belief in absolute certainty. Consequently, theology is open to playful interpretations and may even entertain the notion that the relationship between God and the devil can be understood as a narrative that spans Western history, starting from prehistory with Adam and Eve, and culminating in the concept of original sin and guilt.

The devil and his counterpart are characters in a scene who perform dramatically in roles that are mistaken for sins, as they are false. However, these

roles are merely part of the theatrical performance and should not be mistaken for actual misdeeds: 'ordered, the sins portrayed on stage serve as a platform for depicting diabolical activities.' (Flusser, 2005, p. 45). In this dramatic scene, we find ourselves immersed in the territory of make-believe, and we embark in a journey to hell. This journey is constructed through various expressions that not only convey meaning, but also serve as actions in themselves. The devil communicates and acts.

Nevertheless, this movement is perplexing and conveys no explicit message, yet implies a multitude of possibilities. This concept of expressing ideas through suggestions is based on the reciprocal relationship between divine creation and that of the devil: these two actions appear to be intertwined, and there is no evidence to suggest any distinct differences. In other words, both God and the devil possess the power of creation, which serves as a defining characteristic for both entities. The common bond between the two main characters resides in their shared capacity to create things that possess an indistinguishable resemblance. However, when it comes to their purpose, there is a distinct contrast between these two identities. Divine creation involves fashioning humanity in the image and likeness of divine perfection (Gên 1,26-28). On the other hand, the devil, in the form of a serpent, does not directly create but rather incites wrongdoing, despite God's warnings to his creatures (Gên 1,14-18). The devil creates sin which, as an anathema, accompanies men. If we consider that God's intention in creating man was to make him in his image and likeness, it might be said that the devil, in turn, introduced sin as a deliberate creation with the ability to corrupt humanity, when man populated the earth with his corporations.

This narrative adherence places *The History of the Devil* and the author on the Judeo-Christian theology axis, which constitutes a theme developed by one of the most cultivated cognitive manifestations in the west scholasticism. Through the transversality of the dramatic scene, the author explores the path that he strongly wishes to avoid, namely philosophy. Disguised in ways of saying, philosophy seems to become silent or, at most, translates as the signature of an inference that presents itself as fiction and, therefore, constitutes a mask of the reflective plane, but gives it communicative immanence and peculiar consistency. It is this mask that allows the author to assert and, jokingly, provoke the reader: *My dear, you didn't understand anything!* ( Flusser, 2005, p. 29).

Therefore, it is evident that the magic of that dramatic strategy lies in the uncovering an identity that constitutes both an attribute of the dramatic action developed and demonstrates that the ability to create is shared by both the devil and God, while also emphasizing a vector that distinguishes the two characters. Polarization is the result of the establishment of dichotomies,

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which restricts identity to the logical nature of what is opposed and must be depolarized in order to be understood. Tension then arises between sin and virtue, between God and the devil, good and evil, right and wrong, time and space, between the knowledge of men and history. Identity is unique; however, when confronted with constraints or polarizations it facilitates the emergence of what is distinctive: difference.

Conflict and antagonism arise between God and the devil as a result of indecision that reduces difference to opposition. Man does not accept consensus, which, when interpreted as nonsense, demonstrates the most eloquent aspect of man's conciliatory action. In this context, the devil is unaware of the distinction and substitutes it with antagonism in order to attain the sole feasible redemption: the formation of an alternative construct that enables us to entertain the notion of disregarding sin. In this manner, sin is portrayed as being redeemed, as it manifests as an ordeal or a pedagogical wickedness, instructing us about the potential of attaining, once more, the paradise that, constructed by advancement, emerges as a counterforce to sin. Man does not realize that true learning can only occur through experiences that seem challenging or different from a comfortable and perpetually content life. Another misconception propagated by the devil is the belief that it is feasible to recreate a modern version of the lost paradise on earth by using technology:

Throughout history, there have been continuous efforts to surpass binary logic. However, the challenge of these endeavors may have stemmed from the need to conceive a novel kind of reasoning that may systematically supersede the traditional binary logic in its role of regulating cognition. Nevertheless, the analogy method diverges. It disrupts logical dichotomies at their external and paralyzing points of variation, not to create a superior synthesis, but to convert them into a dynamic field of opposing forces, where they lose their distinct identities. The principle of excluded middle, which encompasses the fundamental principles of bivalent logic centered on identity and non-contradiction is embraced<sup>1</sup>. (Agamben, 2004, p. XVII)

Seeming to transcend the previous polarity between God and the devil, the analogy presents another recognition of history that, transversal to the oppositions generated by identity dichotomies, enables us to identify the ambivalence of what is undeniably contradictory and undecidable between the dichotomous poles previously observed:

However, this indifference is creative and fruitful, as it neutralizes dichotomies, thereby creating a path, bridging the gap between the two extremes. It serves as a

<sup>1</sup> Original: "Tentativi di superare la logica binaria sono stati fatti in ogni epoca . . . Ma forse il vizio di questi tentativi era di voler pensare una nuova logica, che doveva sostituire punto per punto la vecchia logica binaria nella sua funzione di governo della conoscenza. La strategia dell' anaalogia è affatto diversa. Essa interviene nelle dicotomie logiche nel puno della loro più estrema e paralizzante divaricazione, non per comporle in una sintesi superiore, ma per trasformarle in un campo di forza percorso de tensioni polari, in cui esse perdono la loro identità sostanziali. Si prenda il principio del terzo escluso, che definisce l' essenza delle logiche bivalente fondaate sull'identità o la non-contraddizione".



form of immanent solution that establishes as a new starting point<sup>2</sup>. (Agamben, 2004, p. XVII)

Flusser's work proposes the idea of portraying the devil in a new light, gradually distancing him from his traditional identity. The devil is depicted as alluring and captivating to humans, who, as God's ultimate creation, are susceptible to sin. This sin erodes their original divine likeness and compels them on a wicked journey. In contrast to God, the devil acts as an opponent to humanity and tempts them with sin, which goes against their true nature. However, sin also offers a tangible opportunity for individuals to discover alternative paths to conquer it.

Flusser's perspective challenges the conventional cognitive framework that relies on the binary relationship between virtue and sin. He enables us to comprehend the diversity of God and the devil. In order to accomplish this, he establishes a fictionalized dramatic scenario reminiscent of the idyllic garden of Eden. This strategy enables Flusser to transcend the philosophical canons established since the Middle Ages and, in a subtle manner, highlight the distinction between the previous reality lost and the one that is still within his reach, provided that he can identify a way to transcend sin. The devil is not as ugly as we perceive him to be:

. . . the evolution of the devil and the evolution of life are at least parallel. . . In essence, one of the theses of this book will be the assertion that the evolution of life is merely the embodiment of the evolution of the devil. (Flusser, 2005, p. 24)

The ways of saying are superior to written or mental expressions because, instead of merely explaining, they create tangible representations that, analogous to what is intended, highlight possible consequences, through unconventional semantic caesuras. Thus, the manner in which one expresses nothing elucidates the why nearly anything can be articulated in an inconclusive and imprecise manner, resulting in a sense of disorientation from speaking solely for the sake of speaking. There are distinctions between the affirmation and the way of saying it, the opposition and the antagonistic; the concept and the inference; the abstract and the concrete; the logical and the analogical.

Reiterating the previously highlighted diabolical journey, it is evident that *The History of the Devil* aims to depict the path of the devil in several dimensions in order to create a comprehensive portrayal of the devil. Flusser compels us to adopt this comprehensive vision by means of his statements and interpretation of the modern world as a potentially fictitious reality that opposes falsehood.

<sup>2</sup> Original: "Ma questa indifferenza è creatrice e produttiva, nel senso che, neutralizzando la dicotomia, apre fra i due estremi una via di uscita, una sorta di sorpasso immanente che costituisce un nuovo punto di partenza".

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He emphasizes the importance of resistance as an activity that “should evoke both admiration and astonishment” (Flusser, 2005, p. 24).

The dramatic action of fortuity is established, and its suitable backdrop is the earth through multiple, through ways of saying:

. . . we can assert that the confluence of circumstances and the constellation of influences that made life on Earth possible is a monumental happenstance. . . The “chance” that facilitated life on Earth is entirely fortuitous and devoid of purpose from the perspective of the celestial machine. Consequently, it is not “chance” but rather one of millions of potential constellations. Consequently, the fundamental purpose of the heavens is to provide a vast “opportunity”. (Flusser, 2005, p. 44)

Within this peculiar journey of similarities or false oppositions, it is not surprising that “chance weaves the earth like crochet,” (Flusser, 2005, p. 48) and, in the sense of a possible but not definitive fabric, it is unsurprising that he envisions, or rather, reshapes it into a “stage of transgressions, and the setting of another age of diabolical drama:

We must therefore forsake the devil’s infancy. We will follow his footsteps to enter the green meadows of life. We have limited knowledge of him, but solely on an intellectual level. He provoked neither fear nor anger. . . . Then, he must unveil the ethical side of his character. Therefore, let us muster all our courage, as we lift the curtain of the stage of existence in which our personal drama unfolds. (Flusser, 2005, p. 52)

Drama as a form of fiction that challenges the notion that sin, and guilt are intrinsic aspects of human nature and portrays life as make-believe performance. If the earth is considered the domain of the devil, it might be seen as a theatrical setting where he assumes a prominent role. In this context, he can be compared to God, with whom he is often confused as a creative figure. However, analogy does not imply identity. The devil, while not identical to God, is analogous to Him in that he too produces, albeit in his own unique manner.

In contrast to God, the devil makes humans in his own likeness and image, not with the intention of dwelling in a heavenly paradise, but rather to understand the process of creating monsters. Through this, humans are able to collaborate with the devil and learn how to produce diabolical distinctions:

. . . we can produce atomic monsters such as Thorium and Plutonium, whose very names demonstrate their origin. Thor and Pluto are archetypal forms of the devil. (Flusser, 2005, p. 47)

The devil is analogous to God, and, through sin, man is capable of creating and becoming analogous to the devil, therefore god-like via sin. This is the other Genesis Judeo-Christian scripture that constitutes the basis for *The History of the Devil*. The synthesis of this text replaces the creative action of God with the devil's interpretation and man's execution. However, in this scenario, the devil takes on a different approach. Instead of banishing man from paradise, he cunningly deceives him into believing that through technological advancements, man will have the ability to populate and dominate the earth. "But linear progress is the work of the devil" (Flusser, 2005, p. 23).

By drawing a parallel between deeds, the devil manipulates humankind into perceiving themselves as godlike. This diminishes the earlier conflict and turns Eden into a theatrical setting, revealing that the devil's influence on earth is really a work of fiction that can be disregarded. The opening scene of this peculiar narrative establishes that while God and the devil may seem similar, they are not identical. It suggests that the devil influences human activities, but that men are not identical to the devil. Flusser, the author of *The History of the Devil*, shares a deep connection with his character/man, although it is important to note that the author is not exactly the same as his character:

Why fear the devil? Why run away from the devil? These are the types of existential questions that this book will pose explicitly and implicitly. Who can predict the answers? Who knows the end of a book, when starting to write it? The reader is now aware of the doubts and inner tensions that motivated this book. (Flusser, 2005, p. 29)

Flusser's subtle outburst announces his doubts when assuming the position of author of *The History of the Devil*: recognizing the nuanced analogy that, while similar, does not preserve complete identity and therefore disregards the integrity of the distinguishing characteristics that define creations of nature. The loss of the proper name that enables the rejection of knowledge as a domain of reality, resulting in the need to seek shelter within the confines of a persona that can solely be acknowledged within the context of life; to transcend the need to renounce sin as its most tangible attribute; to overcome the need to embrace simulacra of sin that, while shaping human history, can be diluted within the frail progression of time and eventually be forgotten.

The loss of identity compels both the devil and humankind to seek alternative pathways and establish fresh foundations. It is important to recognize that the analogy does not provide any explanation, as it is reduced to mere description which is limited to our basic understanding. Such understanding is centered

on the present moment and cannot examine the unfathomable future, which always seems distant and potentially adversarial. The following are the attributes that the devil assigns to humanity, his rightful heirs:

Amidst the purity of life and the uncomplicated nature of death, dreams, ailments, raptures, and other seemingly unattainable conditions emerge, introducing imprecise values, illogical or transcendent resolutions into the realm of understanding, accompanied by peculiar progressions, fluctuations, and indescribable phrases. – as we have no names for the things in the midst of which we are completely alone<sup>3</sup>. (Valéry, 1924, p. 192)

<sup>3</sup> Original: « Entre la netteté de la vie et la simplicité de la mort, les rêves, les malaises, les extases, tous ses états à demi impossibles, qui introduisent, dirait-on, des valeurs approchées, des solutions irrationnelles ou transcendentes dans l'équation de la connaissance, placent d'étranges degrés, des variétés et des phases ineffables, - car il n'est point de noms pour des choses parmi lesquelles on est bien seul ».

This way, the peculiar logic of analogy leads to the misinterpretation of that which reaches no conclusion, as it simultaneously affirms and denies everything, giving rise to an illusory sense of intellectual freedom.

Illusory as manifested through uncertainty and marked by the incompleteness of knowledge: “The gesture that demonstrates the meaninglessness of binary logic does not display a superior logical principle. But, most importantly, the lack of sense” (Agamben, 2004, p. XVII).

The creation of this irrational and therefore fictional meaning is achieved by transcending or resolving the dichotomy or opposition, resulting in the emergence of an unforeseen third element: “The third element persists by disidentifying and neutralizing the first two, which then serve as opposing forces in a field of vector tensions”<sup>4</sup> (Agamben, 2004, p. XVII).

<sup>4</sup> Original: « Il gesto che mostra il non-senso della logica binaria, non esibisce un principio logico superiore, ma piuttosto anche il proprio non-senso ».

#### WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING AS THE TRICKERY OF HUMANKIND

Analogy serves as a vivid portrayal of an nameless angel who, positioned as a powerless figure caught in the conflict between identity and opposition, represents the ultimate historical deception. This deception is formed by the third and ultimate illusion: the potential interpretations of sin. Alternative expressions, currently created using unoriginal structures, consist of phrases derived from mundane aspects of daily existence. These expressions, formed as a consequence of human actions tainted by sin, have lost their significance and are now perceived as trivial and insignificant occurrences in our everyday lives. The manifestations of the seven deadly sins now take on ordinary disguises, employing allegories strategically to convey their intended message. By trivializing and discrediting the all-encompassing and discredited dogmatism from the outset, these allegories can generate a new type of captivating interpretation. Learning from the devil, man is able to play tricks and create disguises:

The celestial and terrestrial realms coalesced to generate the life-giving river that meanders in pursuit of the spiritual ocean. We employ the allegory of water circulation to describe the phenomena of life deliberately and for pragmatic purposes. This allegory simplifies all facets of existence into a singular representation... highlighting the indeterminate nature of life where seemingly disparate individuals are a mere illusion, like drops in a river or rain. Several further elements remain hidden in this allegory, elements that allude to the devil and the Divine, which we have no intention of implying, let alone expressing clearly. . . . We are currently prohibited from fully comprehending the profound implications of this parallel with water. . . . To fully grasp its significance, we must adopt a different mindset. In this chapter, we will focus solely on the Western perspective of the concept of the fluidity of life. Specifically, we will explore the literal definition of the word “fluidity of processes of life.” (Flusser, 2005, p. 53-54)

In the allegory of the fluidity of life as water, sins lose the aura that made them vernacular, original, and become commonplace, everyday transgressions that are virtualized. Sin, which appeared as an intruder while dismantling the orderly logic of paradise, becomes commonplace and now takes on the disguise of a quasi-human production: sin presents itself as the devil’s sphinx. Human creations are symbolic representations of evil, but also serve as means of communication: “Life is one of the topics of conversation, possibly the only topic” (Flusser, 2005, p. 71).

But what is a conversation? ‘Conversation is the intellectual aspect of time. The progress of conversation, which represents ‘our’ intellectual growth, is akin to the passage of time in our perception. The past is ‘talked about’, the present is ‘talking’, and the future is ‘to be talked’. From this perspective ‘progress’ and ‘decadence’, ‘development’ and ‘exhaustion’ become synonymous. (Flusser, 1999, p. 69)

The creative impulse of sinful productions is trivialized, invalidated, and disqualified as sin: humanity’s connection with nature is reduced to sexual frustration (lust); the materialization of the symbolic in the range of meanings of linguistics becomes an alibi for justifying the creation of the technology as a necessity (anger); the civilizational path transforms the natural processes of organic metabolism into industrial products of inconsequential pleasurable consumption (gluttony); the search for ascension and maintenance of social positions makes all means ethically justifiable and all states of exception become normalized and necessary (envy and avarice); in the ethical leisure that is conferred by conquered positions, mankind is absent and silent in the soliloquy of its own self and everyone

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is perceived as enemies usurping man's conquest (pride); isolating, man is finally alone again, but sad and lazy, he is absent from the fight, and finally he resigns himself, because he cannot have everything (sloth). Man conforms to this fate and history is something that unfolds without having happened (post-history). This is the scripture that marks the transition from analogy to allegory serving as the last tool found by Flusser to help humans understand that their surroundings require historical responses; which, despite appearing immoral, are fundamentally human, profoundly human:

. . . so we could affirm that our attempt to escape the devil is another aspect of our attempt to emerge from temporality and enter the kingdom of the immutable Mothers.. (Flusser, 2004, p. 21)

Flusser's rendition of sin imbues his dramaturgy with a less pretentious and more whimsical quality, presenting sin as an allegory for idle chatter. He eliminates the assertion of being a third opposing element from the logical framework established as binary polarization. On the contrary, he assigns a different role to analogy, more modest and natural; more human: transforming analogy into allegory, which, being polysensitive, is mostly incomprehensible. Allegory, as a linguistic process, originates from analogy. However, it requires a dramatic setting to fully express its potential for imitation, allowing the imagination to run wild and transform rational thinking into a form of language and expression that deviates from the norm. Allegory emerges from a residual form of logical reflection, a cognitive error. In this sense, all allegory is analogical, but not all analogy is allegorical (Melandri, 2004, p. 76).

Allegory, despite its dramatic nature, is not a sign conventionality. To truly grasp its essence, one must establish peculiar and very sensitive resemblances that are created by the imagination, guided by mimesis and similarity. It is imperative to go beyond the confines of logical reasoning and delve into the anti-paralyzing underlying essence of the analogy, specifically, to uncover the concealed meanings inside allegories. What lies beneath ways of saying and poses a challenge to our comprehension? What does sin conceal or obscure? How can we comprehend Flusser's ideas as presented in *The History of the Devil*? How can one comprehend the counter-narrative of post-history?

In the preface to *The History of the Devil* published in 1965, Flusser states that these are meditations and clarifies:

The meditations were, in essence, divided into two distinct phases. The initial phase began with my forced departure from a realm known as "Prague" at the hands of the

Nazis, culminating in the creation of unpublished notes in German. The second phase started with my assimilation into the actuality known as “Brazil” and culminated in the publication of this book. Two individuals significantly influenced the first phase: Alexandre Bloch and Helmut Wolff, both residing in São Paulo. I was caught in the crossfire between these two opposing mentalities: between sadness and lust, both in a desperate quest for a salvific faith. My mind became the stage of a struggle between these two mentalities. I hope both of them can recognize ‘their reflections’ in my mirror, even though they may be distorted. I experienced four impacts in the second phase. The first came from a group of young men and women, who represented the finest qualities of our youth. . . . A cohort of young individuals, who were my daughter’s acquaintances, convened at my residence to “discuss,” which is to say, to attempt to find an open and honest dialogue regarding the circumstances that surrounds us. I trust that this struggle has played a role in the development of their minds, as well as in mine. It is highly likely that these young individuals will substantially contribute to Brazilian culture. (Flusser, 2005, p. 19)

This autobiographical mark underscores the introspective nature of this book and, above all, its aim to engage with other minds or perhaps to elicit support, in a metaphorical and symbolic manner, for the author’s desire to comprehend diverse realities in order to communicate them or extract valuable lessons from them. The purpose of the book is to teach the art of expressing ideas through allegory, thus elevating it to a superior method of inquiry compared to traditional learning. *The History of the Devil* is an allegorical representation of the contemporary world focused on the consecration of technique and, through that, on a possible history that can be restarted, devoid of reconstructions of the devil’s influence and the mask of sin. However, to do so, it is necessary to comprehend the devil’s intentions throughout history and the concealed nature of sin. Dialectics conceals the aspects that the work of the devil offers us in order to obscure them:

The broad secular and historical horizon that Görres and Creuzer attribute to allegorical intention, as natural history, pre-history of meaning or intention, is of a dialectical nature. . . . whereas, in the symbol, with the transfiguration of decline, the metamorphosed face of nature reveals itself fleetingly in the light of salvation, the allegory shows the observer the facies hippocrita of history as a fossilized proto-landscape . . . (Benjamin, 1984, p. 188).

Is dialectics merely idle talk and thus another creation of the devil that instructs humans to depict history as anti-history, devoid of time and consequently devoid of responsibility? Is dialectic a deceptive tactic acquired by humans

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from the devil to diminish the gravity of sin and convert it into advancements characterized by progress, a concept detached from time, influenced by technology, and hailed as an invention?

Sins are transformed into euphemisms, rebranded as accomplishments of humanity: Lust is a powerful force that may turn sexual desire into a driving force for life, scientific exploration, or the ability to read, narrate and write, understood as social class privileges; anger is a substitute for the law, while simultaneously embodying the unpredictability inherent to chance, which in turn influences historical events, gluttony has the ability to convert basic materials into products that lead to the widespread celebration of consumption; envy overcomes avarice in conversation, as it can cleverly devise unjust but advantageous strategies to supposedly resolve all conflicts; pride has a strong affinity for poetry and seeks to cover up ignorance with pseudoscience; sloth converts the melancholy of idleness, of hiding in the ivory tower that turns it into a craving for entertainment. Sins allow all states of exception and rationalize the notion that the ends justify all means. Therefore, sins normalize all inconsequential exercises of power, exclusions, defamation, accusations without proof, dissemination of false news, exploitations, selfishness and vanity concealed in all manifestations of nationalism.


These inversions serve as allegories of sin and do not hide its effects. Instead, provide us with opportunities to discover potential solutions that may still be a result of sin or, alternatively, indications of a different approach that will not reduce humanity to a mere representation of God. Rather, it will enable individuals to acknowledge those who have the ability to transcend the pervasive affliction of sin in everyday life. Hope is the last trick of humanity in coexistence with sin.

Sin is the result of the analogy between God and the devil in their respective creative identities: God created man in his own image and likeness, while the devil produced sin. Consequently, in this context, no blame can be attributed to man, as sin does not define the essence of man. In contrast to the comparison between God and the devil, it is the responsibility of humanity to devise clever and symbolic representations that exist alongside, but separate from, sin, which is ultimately trivialized. If humankind is not responsible for sin, thus, not to blame, man is responsible for technology and its historical transformations. Humanity bears the responsibility for shaping the course of history, and no deceptive tactics or disguises can conceal this reality. This is where Flusser's pedagogical dramaturgy concludes.

However, as a philosopher without definitive convictions, Flusser, the playwright, uses the devil's tools to suggest the possibility of an "initial indication of non-diabolical interference in the harmony of existence" (Flusser, 2005, p. 68). "Our somewhat tired gaze has already accepted the thesis that lust is the



primary driving force of the mind and has long ceased observing the juggling of these modern sorcerers (p. 76).

Is it possible for us, readers of Flusser, to accept this proposition and acknowledge that dialectics can enable us to identify the devil's artifacts and immoral contrivances? Have we ultimately acquired knowledge from *The History of the Devil* and Flusser's dramaturgy? Will we be able to discern between the guises of sin and those of the devil, who manipulates history and interprets it as a metaphor for life? Is it possible that allegory is the devil's ultimate deception, aimed at absolving us of our responsibility for history? The answers to these questions are decisions that must be made; however, they are not Tales of the Devil! 

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