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Translation as an Act of Freedom –
Vilém Flusser's Philosophy of Translation

Introduction

This essay takes as starting point Flusser's early writings about language and translation. Language is reflected through existentialism, logical symbolism, the philosophy of language and phenomenology. It becomes thereby itself an object of vertical translations into different knowledge domains. However, the crucial question related to translation into another language is how linguistic utterances, embedded in different grammatical structures, can be successfully communicated. This leads Flusser to the problem of translation and lastly to the question of freedom. His theory of translation arises from an existentialist view on his immediate surroundings – in the sense of Ortegas' 'circumstances' – which is brought up only through language. It echoes his own experience that he describes as abysmal or 'groundless' (*bodenlos*).

The expression 'groundlessness' characterizes his whole oeuvre and it is, besides, the title of his autobiographical book *Bodenlos*. In an existential way, it attests exactly what it expresses: to be without ground under the feet, that is, to have no livelihood and support. It is the negation of an existence, the 'being thrown' (*Geworfensein*) into new contexts. According to Flusser, it denotes the breakdown of civilization that happened with Auschwitz. Thereby new perspectives are unfolded. Habits are put aside, groundlessness turns into freedom, which gets a positive frame through Heidegger's concept. (Heidegger 2006: 178) Exile becomes the condition of the possibility for writing in four languages. In terms of communication theory, migration and exile stand for a situation of new information while redundancy prevails at home. In Brazil, Flusser discovers through the contact with artists, such as Haroldo de Campos, Décio Pignatari and Guimarães Rosa, the poetry and force of imagination of the Portuguese language announcing a new start and a chance for self-fulfillment. Groundlessness as practical and cognitive experience is tied to the religious field without being restricted to any special kind of faith or religion. Moreover, it is related to an abyss as in Camus' notion of the 'absurd'.[1] Translation is therefore interpreted as a jump over the abyss of nothingness, in which language comes to silence while being in prayer with the divine.

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[1] Flusser's Brazilian engagement has to be understood in terms of this notion. As Camus notes in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* the 'absurd man' never gives up and his efforts do not cease despite of the barriers man challenges. Cf. Albert Camus, *Der Mythos des Sisyphos*, p. 145. The abyss is also emblematic for Flusser's ambition to translate and retranslate his texts in search of comprehension on both sides of the Atlantic.

This sacred moment allegorizes Flusser's restart in Brazil where he had to overcome ten years of silence and first had to learn Portuguese in order to take part in the intellectual life.

In the first part of this essay I pick up Flusser's thoughts about the force and power of language and relate them to Ernst Jünger's book *Geheimnisse der Sprache,* a book which is noted in the bibliography of *Língua e Realidade.* However, Jünger's text has not been, until now, a topic of an intertextual comparison.[2] The basis for my essay are Flusser's first writings from the 1950s, the unpublished typescript *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert,* his first book *Língua e Realidade,* edited in Brazil in 1963, as well as the essays from *A dúvida* and his texts on the act of writing from the 1970s and 1980s. The focus lies on the tense relation between domination and being dominated by language that he feels in the moment of translation and which originates from his word-based translation.

In the second part, also within the notion of groundlessness, I deal with Flusser's method of translation. According to him, there is always the possibility of translation as an approximation of the source text into the target language, constrained by the respective language typology. Whether a translation is possible or not depends on the epistemological categories of each language which, for their part, structure the setting of the linguistic cosmos. Last but not least, it is up to the 'fragrancy' (*fragrância*) of the language that he smells when phenomenologically throwing off the stock of knowledge.[3] At this point, I draw a line to Ernst Jünger as well as to Walter Benjamin's notion 'way of meaning' (*Art des Meinens*). Besides the structural procedure of translation, I will treat the sacred aspect of this shifting which stands in the tradition of Jewish *pilpul,* as Rainer Guldin and Irmgard Zepf set out (Zepf 2004; Guldin 2004). Finally, I argue that, after the loss of language as a consequence of the Shoah, Flusser's continuous activity of translation and self-translation is a way out to achieve freedom by taking part in and opening towards the other, and that it is exactly in this turnover of a self-imposed negation or privation of German language into positivity, i.e. into freedom, in which I recognize the constant of Flusserian thinking.

Part 1

Already in his first writings, namely in the unpublished typescript *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert,* Flusser deals with the notion of language. Every thought that cannot be put into words seems very suspicious to him. Even the fact of the multiplicity of languages he articulates carefully by stating that thoughts are formed differently in people's mind when speaking different languages (Flusser 1957: 58). Still, he formulates his ideas too simplistically and unscientifically attesting a certain priority to

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[2] Jünger's *Geheimnisse der Sprache* is composed of two texts: *Lob der Vokale,* first published 1934, and *Sprache und Körperbau,* published 1947. The edition used here is the one by Vittorio Klostermann from 1963.

[3] A good example for this method can be found in the essay "Schach" in *Dinge und Undinge: Phänomenologische Skizzen.*

languages structured by subject, object and predicate, whereas those that differ from the referred model would be simply called 'Chinese'. However, it is remarkable to see that Flusser found his upcoming topic, language and communication, while he was typing *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert*. In here, he even provides an orientation about the character and origin of translations. First of all, following the Tower of Babel story of the Old Testament, translations are a consequence of the Babylonian confusion. Hereby we are forced to recognize the relativity of our epistemological categories. In *Língua e Realidade* we read: "The multiplicity of languages reveals the multiplicity of the categories of knowledge".[4] (Flusser 1963b: 39) Yet our categories are not valid for all languages and realities. And therefore we are more helpless the more often we jump from one world into another.

But the translation process cannot be understood without the writing procedure. A closer look at Flusser's essays about writing might thus be worthwhile.[5] In these he explains why writing is existentially necessary, making use of the Latin aphorism: "*Scribere necesse est, vivere non est*" which precedes his book *Die Schrift. Hat Schreiben Zukunft?*[6], followed by the comment: "*Frei nach Heinrich dem Seefahrer*" – in fact this dictum derives from Plutarch's "*Navigare necesse est, vivere non est necesse*", an aphorism that found its proliferation in the Lusophone imaginary from Fernando Pessoa over Caetano Veloso to Ulysses Guimarães. Inter-discursive connections are to be discovered and productively taken up in this quotation. That way, Flusser might understand the sentence as an existential release, while at the same time he points out the tragedy of writing since this gesture is exceedingly threatened with extinction and replaced in future by other forms and gestures of informing, e.g. pictures, videos, and computers. Despite the alleged absurdity of writing in our times, it is necessary for those who have something to say. In many of his essays, he emphasizes the connection between writing and history, since history begins at the point where humankind starts to write. Writing becomes a genuine property of human being and thus an anthropological premise of any historical being. Historical thinking is a basic prerequisite to the writing procedure of our tireless essayist and herein he finds himself – as he said – confronted with a 'dialectics of freedom'. On the one hand, he is condemned to write *qua conditio humana* – he expresses it 'communicologically' by saying that he is 'programmed'[7] –, on the other hand, he does what he wants to do: "to do what I must do, and therefore to do what I want to do is the dialectics of freedom." (Flusser xxxe: 8) In a speech entitled "Die Geste des Schreibens" for the University of St. Gallen, in 1981, he

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[4] All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.
[5] For example: "Die Geste des Schreibens", "Writing", "Is there a future to writing?".
[6] The English version was translated by Nancy Ann Roth with the title: *Does writing have a future?*
[7] That term confirms Flusser's inner will to keep on writing. At the same time it announces the end of the alphabetical code and the inception of digital and multidimensional codes. Flusser is optimistic and open-minded towards the new codes. But as far as his own intellectual production is concerned the shift comes too late, as he belongs to a type of 'archaic existence' for which writing is giving meaning to life.

justifies this dialectics in another way, distinguishing a visible from an invisible writing process. Visible is only the process of writing, invisible are the guiding thoughts, though being restrained by rules of grammar. In the German edition of the book *Gesten* he emphasizes a further aspect of freedom that is being expressed by writing. In that the differentiation between nature and culture becomes evident: writing is, according to Flusser, an innate ability, though it is not an uncontrolled reflex but rather a gesture we are free to perform. (Flusser 1994b: 32-33)[8] While translating, a freedom confining component comes into operation. Thereby, it evolves a tension between the power of the translated words and the consciousness. Flusser writes: "In my memory exist words from different languages. They are not synonymous. Each language has its own atmosphere and, thus, represents a universe apart. It is imprecise to say that I dominate the languages stored in my memory. Surely, I can translate, and in that sense I transcend them all. […] But in another sense it is the language that dominates me, programs me and transcends, because each of them throw me in its own universe. I cannot write without recognizing the power of words and languages over myself." (ibidem: 37) At this point, it becomes apparent how Flusser sticks to a classical word-to-word-translation, while, simultaneously trying to expand and deepen the sense of the original thought, as Rainer Guldin demonstrates in his essay "Translating philosophy: Vilém Flusser's practice of multiple self-translation". (Guldin 2013) Thus, it is more about a philosophical than a literary translation.

By highlighting the respective language atmosphere and the related dominance of singular words the reading of Ernst Jünger's *Geheimnisse der Sprache* shines through. In this way, Jünger writes about the "magic power of ancient sounds that combines the meaning of all mother tongues in itself." (Jünger 1963: 22) The power of words is even more evident in a further excerpt from Flusser's "Die Geste des Schreibens", as he says: "The words are units which vibrate and have a life of their own. They have their rhythm, their harmonies, and their tunes. In their roots they hold the ancient wisdom of the whole history, whose inheritor I am." (Flusser 1994b: 36) Jünger starts by classifying languages at the phonetic level of the sounds, Flusser mostly morphologically at the words' level. Nevertheless, both thinkers share a similar view on the origin of language. For Jünger the sounds belong "to the primordial matter (*Urstoff*) of the world like the soil in which they are rooted." (Jünger 1963: 33) Here we encounter very similar lexical fields, as for instance those formed by 'primordial' (*Ur*) in the compound words 'primordial matter' and 'age-old' (*uralt*)[9], as well as the topos of 'rootedness' (*Verwurzelung*). Flusser considers the words rooted in history, while

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[8] For Friedrich Kittler the technical machine with which we write is directly linked to the thoughts we express. It does not only accompany these thoughts but rather shapes them by the procedures it imposes. This is what Kittler calls the 'technical apriori'. To some extent this is also valid for Flusser's media theory, as for him writing means a gesture of putting in order the ideas and, most of all, the initiation of historical thinking.

[9] 'Primordial' is used as a prefix in German, hence it forms compounds that cannot be translated one-to-one into English.

for Jünger the sounds are based in a dimension preceding history, namely "beyond the computation of time" (ibidem), corresponding to the term 'non-history' (*Ungeschichte*) in Flusser's terminology. Both amateur philologists agree on a further issue concerning language conception, i.e. the conviction that language is nurtured "by the ineffable" (ibidem: 56) and that therefore its origin and destination lies in the 'unspeakable', in nothingness. In Flusser's language diagram this would be marked as the "area of prayer", where language fades into nothingness: "The area of prayer is that much far apart from the area of conversation that it almost does not seem to be language. It seems to be the attempt to express what is beyond expression, to think what is beyond thinking." (Flusser 1963b: 183) Being at prayer means to have a conversation with the ineffable, the divine. This happens, according to Flusser, when the intellect overcomes the language and vanishes. All that remains is silence.

In such a way it is proposed in an article he wrote for the *Jornal do Comércio* in 1966 that traces back to his interpretation of Wittgenstein at the time: "Silence is the fundament and the destination of language." (Flusser 1966) Jünger's approach to the ineffable is at first glance less devoted[10], but identical in content. His book *Das Abenteuerliche Herz* is not about the silence of the words, but the flattening and the end of the voices, so ultimately the sounds. Jünger writes: "With the content of truth and validity the voices became deeper, and to the same extent the feeling of pleasure grew. At each stage, the conclusions became more essential and meaningful, and yet more simple. Finally, a single voice remained at this fall into the fountain of knowledge, a dark murmur that seemed to approach the absolute point, the zone of the primordial words. And as there was nothing else to be thought of the voice became silent, too. It became quiet; the last desire and the last perception cut themselves within the unconsciousness." (Jünger 2013: 47) Thus, there is a positive reframing of the Heideggerian fall from which one sinks, after a moment of reflection, in the "sensation of thinking" (ibidem), instead of falling down to the "banality of the man". (Heidegger 2006: 127)

The basis of his writing, therein included his translating, is Flusser's existential homelessness, respectively the fact that he transcended his ancestral culture towards a completely new one, in his case the Brazilian. In many texts he presents his translation activity as natural, which he, so to speak, had learned from the cradle, when he bilingually - German/Czech - grew up in Prague during the interwar period (Flusser 1992: 79), and which is also grounded in the need of publishing in exile later on. An indication of his style of writing and his ambivalent love affair with the languages he writes in is the undated German typescript "Eine Sprachpraxis"[11]. There, he pictures his

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[10] To get an impression of that kind of devotion read the following passage in *A dúvida*: "It is Moses who comes back from Mount Sinai to the valley of conversation after having wrested the Commandments from the Ineffable. It is Prometheus who comes back from the Mount Olympus to the valley of conversation after having taken the fire from the Ineffable." (Flusser 2011: 80)

[11] Presumably, this essay was written shortly after Flusser's return from Brazil to Europe in 1972 and served as a model for "Die brasilianische Sprache" in his autobiography *Bodenlos*. Pursuant to a letter addressed on the 2nd December

daily work with language as a struggle that he fights with himself and the language he is thinking at the exact moment. All this takes place in the emotional-existential categories of resignation/subjugation and control/change. Either he surrenders to the language, submits to its rules, or he tries to change them. On the one hand, language is reflected in Wilhelm von Humboldt's tradition as *energeia*, hence as an instrument and a tool, while at the same time an attraction emerges from it, which can be overwhelming, dominant, and even amorous. In both aspects of language, in the instrumental as well as in the lovely-erotic, the power of language over its speaker is revealed.

In his *Bochumer Vorlesungen* from 1991 Flusser summarizes his daily struggle with the languages, proclaiming it in a sacred and somewhat prophetical manner: "Between me and my text are some languages. [...] I pass through the language into the text. Why am I doing this? I have heard the call of the language. [...] The language speaks to me, it calls me, and it chimes inside me. [...] At least four languages are doing this. They ask me to intervene and to change them. [...] One possible complaint could be that there is a will to power to become master of the language; and in this way to become a master of those who read me, thereby taking any political power." (Flusser 2009: 146-148) To exploit language for political or other purposes and to exert mental or physical power over others seems strange to Flusser's character and thus he answers promptly: "I want nothing. I want to live. I can only do this when I write." (ibidem: 148) At this point, his religious and spiritual vocation to language expresses itself clearly as well as the prominent Jewish *post mortem* idea whereby we should survive in the memory of others. And certainly, such a survival is easier when written records are left, for they can serve as a reminder for future generations. In the article "Da língua portuguesa" for the *Instituto Brasileiro de Filosofia*, dated from 1/1/1960, a little more than thirty years before the Bochum Lectures, Flusser comes up with the other side of the linguistic power: the erotic. At the beginning of this short text, even prior to *Língua e Realidade*, he puts the Latin epigraph: "*Gratias tibi ago, Domine, vidi rem novam.*" This emphasizes not only the divine dimension which he assigns to language but it also relates his language discovery to the historical context of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. By that, Flusser doubly elevates his own individual experience with the Portuguese language transcribing it with a Creator myth and a *Mundus Novus* discoverer myth. Sure, the discovery was not for granted and the new terrain had to be conquered step by step with hard-earned efforts. Hence, after having felt like 'a naked savage lost on the asphalt of the streets' (*selvagem nu perdido no asfalto*)[12] Flusser describes language as a transfor-

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1974 to Hans Paeschke, the chief editor of the *Merkur – German magazine for European thought* - it appears as if Flusser had sent the text to *Merkur* as an introduction to his person. Paeschke refuses to publish "Eine Sprachpraxis" (letter of 12/12/74), since it was not sufficiently objective and too subjective. Besides, he responds that he had not heard of a writer of distinction who translates himself.

[12] Remarkable here is the *contradictio in adjecto* in this quotation. The savage, we usually imagine in the jungle, suddenly changes its habitat and inhabits the big city. Reference can also be made to Mário de Andrade's modernist book

mation of a 'gear' (*engrenagem*) and 'machine' (*máquina*) into a 'living and beautiful organism' (*organismo vivo e belo*), accompanied by the transformation of linguistic antipathy into sympathy. (Flusser 1960: 1) Through this gradual anthropomorphization of language, Flusser's relationship to it is not only grounded in aesthetic pleasure, but also in love, particularly when language becomes part of ourselves: "when we want to be embraced by it, when we long for it and want to possess it." (ibidem) The act of love is outlined in detail: "We want to penetrate the language, want to get mixed with it, want to pass our spirit to it and want to be inspired by its spirit, so that, by means of this creative act, a new being is born." (ibidem) Simultaneously with this new love, his mother, i.e. his mother tongue, starts to protest as well as the other betrayed lovers in envy of his recent affair with Portuguese.

In 1960, twenty years after his arrival in Brazil, Portuguese had already become an instrument of his interpretation, it does not only mean the world it rather constitutes his world from then on. Caught up in this hopeful sentiment he repeats Goethe's dictum he had formulated before in *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert*: 'The more languages we speak the more we live.' (ibidem: 2) In the course of his essay, Flusser pictures his love to Portuguese in contrast to the German language. The latter had brought him verbal monsters, such as Heidegger's terms 'presence' (*Vorhandensein*), 'being-ready-to-hand' (*Zuhandensein*) and 'being' (*Wesenheit*), while the Portuguese could express in its ontology the trinity of the verb 'to be' (*sein*) by the solid, quiet and authentic verbs *ser*, *estar* and *ficar*, whereby anyone who masters the Portuguese language would automatically become an existentialist: "Philosophers can write treaties and profound essays [...] on antimetaphysical axiology [...], but they never achieve the final and conclusive simplicity of an 'alright' pronounced by a girl. They can research on the ontological aspects of time and space, but they will never find such a convincing formula as: 'It's on the Right street'." [13] (ibidem: 3) In addition to the verb 'to be', he comes up with other words he was fascinated by in the new language: the verb *deixar* and the noun *graça*. Again it strikes one that Flusser is only concentrated on singular word translations, but not on structures or texts.

Going on in his language inquiries, in the text "Ensaio para um estudo do significado ontológico da língua" from 1962, he is concerned with an integral view on reality because the modern fragmentation into special disciplines, e.g. science, ethics and aesthetics, contributes to the fact that we would lose reality and clinically slip down to madness, philosophically to disgust and theologi-

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Macunaíma, in which the protagonist finds himself unexpectedly placed in the urban world and faces speechlessly the machinery of São Paulo. The comparison with the subtitle of the book, 'a hero without a character', gains solidity by reminding that the word 'character' bears the meaning of 'letter' in Portuguese, alluding to the fact that Flusser had first to learn the new language in order to become a respected man of letters. See also Willi Bolle, *Physiognomik der modernen Metropole*, pp. 277-280.

[13] The "rua Direita" is a street in the city center of São Paulo and does not indicate a direction.

cally to hell. All those who work against this trend form a vanguard of an integral language philosophy. According to Flusser, philosophy is primarily language philosophy. Consequently, a new language philosophy has to arise which arranges all philosophical issues under the primacy of language. Only in this way can science, arts, and religion be fully restored. Otherwise the modern mind continues driving away in its disintegration caused by the shredding procedures of specialized knowledge. (Flusser 1962a: 70) Flusser seeks to establish a unity between the sciences, by a method that does not separate the problems but rather conceives them in a single conceptual framework. This system is language. Although reality is not *a priori* inside the language, it appears to us exclusively in form of language. Thus, language means reality. Everything our inner and outer senses inform us about must be dressed in language in order to be grasped and understood. The origin of this idea can be found in the scriptures of various religions: Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism - they all use one synonym for the word God: *logos*, *namarupa*, *hachem hacadoch*, that is 'word'. Without submitting to a single religion, he frequently emphasizes that language is his special kind of religiosity. In "Em busca de significado" he writes: "It [language] is my form of religiosity." (Flusser 1969b: 499) In *Língua e Realidade* Flusser explains his commitment to language with the search for restoration of an order that was lost through 'chaotic phenomena' - by which he means the disaggregation into many epistemological approaches due to scientific differentiation. 'Chaos' accounts for a state of incomprehension, which could be transformed into a 'cosmos' through structure and hierarchy. Therefore, language stands for the unity of the cosmos. (Flusser 1963b: 16)[14]

Although the terms 'chaos' and 'cosmos' were not used in the intellectual precursor of *Língua e Realidade* the reasoning remains the same. In my opinion, Flusser's first published book is structured, in content and form, upon Alfred North Whitehead's *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* from 1929. Whitehead is about to design a system that combines all the epistemological approaches to the world and contributes to a unified metaphysics. Here, natural sciences and humanities would not be categorically separated, inasmuch as both are equally regarded as access to reality and being. In addition, Flusser adopts Whitehead's structure and organization of the book into five parts, all of which are non-linear but illuminate the subject by leaps and bounds and from different perspectives, resulting in an unavoidable circularity and repetition of ideas. Flusser remains faithful to this structure in his book *A dúvida* written almost at the same time as *Língua e Realidade*. It also consists of five parts and examines the language topic, i.e. 'real knowledge', by drawing the Cartesian doubt, in which he designates the problem of all kinds of knowledge as a problem of translation.[15] He is aware that man is always looking for the sacred trinity: knowledge, reality and truth, and may be

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[14] Flusser's concept of language also includes mathematics and poetry.
[15] In *A dúvida* he writes: "The global knowledge would be the result of translation of all levels of abstraction into a neutral level, e.g. the level of philosophical language." (Flusser 2011: 86)

called 'alive' only in this sense. Because, according to Flusser, if we run out of questions, if we are no longer searching for meaning - and that is the programmatic title he gave to his essay "Em busca de signficado" for the self-portraits published in Stanislaus Ladusans philosophical volume "*Rumos da filosofia atual no Brasil*" in 1976 - then we have already died. This he only knew too well.

Starting from the premise that it is language that captures reality, he raises the question whether there are as many realities as there are languages? (Flusser xxxa: 3) Philosophically and practically this implies, however, that, assuming there were so many realities, one can no longer distinguish what is true or false in our knowledge. But this is not the point, since judgments like 'true' and 'false' have their validity only within certain categories that some languages do not even have. Consequently, our linguist-philosopher enters the depths of language and inspects their ontological and epistemological densities and leaks. He knows that this holds a few surprises and so he writes not without a cheerful touch of irony: "If Kant had stated that his categories are not primordial qualifiers (*Urbedingungen*) of the human spirit at all, but only prerequisites of those spirits thinking in the East Prussian dialect his piety would have suffered." (ibidem: 4) The idea whereby reality is revealed relatively to the linguistically formed categories is not Flusser's. The principle of linguistic relativity, which in his words from 1951 results in a "relativization of reality and knowledge" (ibidem) follows its way over Sapir/Whorf to Wilhelm von Humboldt. Judging by the bibliography at the end of *Língua e Realidade* Flusser makes recourse to Leo Weisgerber's book *Vom Weltbild der deutschen Sprache* published in 1950. That is particularly interesting because Weisgerber's language theory came under suspicion of having one-sidedly privileged the German language whereupon the author was placed in the corner of national (*völkisch*) linguists.[16]

Part 2

How does the subject of translation come up here? For that reason, consider again Flusser's essay on the ontological significance of language. The first problem with its study is that language is a mediator between mind and reality, and at the same time an object of study. Therefore, one has to take a step back from it in order to objectively examine it. This distance can be achieved by comparison with other languages. The ontological content of a language will then be questioned as soon as one starts denoting a thing with two different words from two languages, e.g. *porta* and

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[16] On the other hand, here may also shine through the reading of Friso Melzer's *Unsere Sprache im Lichte der Christus-Offenbarung*, 1951. Melzer had in fact keen interest in Indian culture, since he lived as a missionary in India from 1935-1940. Although there is no direct evidence that Flusser had read Melzer's book it does not seem unfounded that he had knowledge of it for he was preoccupied with themes as Eastern and Christian religion in the early 1950s.

'door'. One literally seems to be losing reality. However, when the newly learned language really found its way into the spirit of the language learner then the mind jumps from one language to another and translates authentically. (Flusser 1962a: 72) The translating mind begins to perform a type of acrobatics when one foot is still on the banks of one, while the other has already arrived on the banks of the other language. Immediately Flusser gives an example of his method: "I am afraid of tomorrow's examination at the dentist", which, according to him, would correspond in Portuguese: "*Eu me receio diante da amanhanesca pesquisa perto do dentemédico.*" (Flusser 1963b: 50) In *Língua e Realidade* he calls this kind of translation 'significative', though it is grotesque, which becomes evident when it is retranslated into English: "there I am in fear of the request I am making to the dentist tomorrow". He calls another type of translation 'real' or 'lexical'; also that one is not satisfying and offers the following translation for the English sentence: "*existência da primeira pessoa singular presente junto com mêdo pertencente à consulta o que estou andando fazer para o dentista amanhã.*" (ibidem) This results in two conclusions: First, two sentences represent the same reality, but they articulate these in different ways. Secondly, two sentences represent two different, but similar realities. Flusser decides for the second option paraphrasing the utterance with reference to a logical deduction as follows: x represents the subject, y the object and f the verb. He performs, in his words, a vertical translation by using the logical symbolism and correlates the results on a continuum between the degree of approximation and distance of the translation in relation to the source language: "the more abstract the dimension of the language the closer will be the translation, and a translation will be more distant the more dense the dimension. As a consequence, a translation of a mathematical work will be much more faithful than a translation of a lyrical poem." (Flusser 1962a: 73) Yet it remains open what kind of criteria for an approximate translation could be applied. To investigate this question Flusser undertakes a series of so-called translation tests. The first one compares the reference system of both languages. Reality means a reference system that informs about everything thought and spoken in the respective language. During the translation act this implicit reference system becomes explicit in the target language, though sometimes in a grotesque way as Flusser has to admit with regard to the example on the dentist appointment. This test takes place only in isolated words and involves no syntactic structures. The translation test fails for languages which are based on different reference systems distant from the one chosen by Flusser. Initially this is German which he imagines close to Portuguese. Failure would be the case, for example, in Chinese or Bantu whose reality is so different that even isolated translations of terms such as 'cause' and 'object' are not possible. Dissatisfied with the expressiveness of the language reference system he passes on to the second method of verification. In short, the translations have to work themselves through the epistemological categories of language. The presence of categories is bound on the allocation of the language within a given language typology. Their conceptual

precursors were August Wilhelm Schlegel and Wilhelm von Humboldt who classified languages into synthetic and analytical. Flusser declines the categories by means of which reality is conceived through three types of language: inflecting, agglutinating and isolating. In *Língua e Realidade* he writes apodictically: "basically there are three types of languages: the inflecting, the agglutinating and the isolating. There are, hence, only three types of worlds within which the human intellect lives." (Flusser 1963b: 51)

Although this method, which analyzes the ontological commitments of languages and judges about whether a translation is possible or not, is a basis for Flusser's translation theory, there is still something that is in a sense transverse to the formal aspect of a language classification by category or types, something that comes close to what Walter Benjamin calls the 'way of meaning' (*Art des Meinens*) in "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers". (Benjamin 1972: 14) In that essay, he uses the German word *Brot*, 'bread', as an example which corresponds to the French *pain*. Its meaning, however, is not the same, which is pointed out by the jurist and philosopher Tercio Sampaio Ferraz Jr. in his text "Interpretação jurídica: interpretação que comunica ou comunicação que se interpreta?" stating herein that these two words would even exclude each other. (Sampaio Ferraz Jr. 2009: 27) The anecdote is the following: French soldiers, after having asked for a *pain* from the German farmers got a black bread while at the same time they were seeing a horse named 'Niquel' and, thus, concluded: *"ça c'est pain pour Niquel"*. Hence, the name for the bread was found: *Pumpernickel*. And it is this kind of bread which resonates in the French idea of German bread, while it cannot be equated with the French word *pain*. Even though as words, as a pure translation, both intend the same thing, still the 'way of meaning' is different. Ultimately, this involves cultural imaginaries that are certainly difficult to express in a translation. The words have other referential contexts than the purely linguistic ones and they are subject to the horizon of meaning and experience of each speech community. In this regard, Flusser speaks of 'fragrancy' (*fragrância*)[17] that should be brought back to the here and now, given the rationality coming across in so many translations: "It is necessary to incline the ear patiently and without prejudices created by science in order to hear and auscultate the words the way they sprout from our inner nature in all its tremendous richness of 'double-entendre', of the unconscious ties with other words; it is necessary to let the word speak for itself." (Flusser 1962a: 81) To bring forth the *aistheton* of language, its true experience, he makes use of the phenomenological reduction[18], whereby the interior of language should be made visible. It is about

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[17] The term 'fragrancy' emphasizes once more the affectionate relationship that Flusser keeps with language, mentioned for Portuguese in Part 1. Through 'fragrancy' the intimate contact with the 'beloved' is ensured. In terms of Flusser's translation practice it represents an anti-symbolic approach to the meaning of the words because 'fragrancy' is soaked up by the senses, not by logical thinking.

[18] With this phenomenological method the actual meaning of the word is neglected. We do not ask what it means. Rather, the word opens before us. It takes possession of our mind and becomes one with it. The comparison with

a knowledge prior to the verbalization perceptible to the senses, something 'primordial' in Jünger's diction, about a primordial matter of which we have already spoken, or what Benjamin calls the "dissolution of the many languages into a single one in which the last secrets after that all thought strives are kept easefully and in silence [...]." (Benjamin 1972: 16) In this quote Benjamin's, Flusser's and Jünger's desire to return to a mono-lingual status before the *confusio linguarum* is reflected. In other words, the imagined status is taken as a basis for the language investigation, as Benjamin is not aiming at a return to a linguistic primal state lost a long time ago, but rather at a redemption projected into the future that originates from "the pure language that means nothing and expresses nothing, but constitutes as the expressionless and creative word the universal meaning [...]." (ibidem: 19)Thereof Benjamin deduces the freedom of translation since it creatively serves "the pure language" that solicits from the original the maximum freedom to form "its way of meaning in the own language." (ibidem: 18)

The acceptance of multilingualism as well as of translation finally arises in Flusser from the negation of monolingualism, which in fact does not exist, since no language is coherent in itself, but presents always different registers, dialects, and sociolects. The guiding principle is again that a supposedly negative circumstance transforms into something profitable which could be distilled in the expression of the 'positivity of the negativity'. The shift is also biographically induced. It is based on physical, spiritual and linguistic deterritorialization, by which he could constantly gain creativity and new standpoints. (Flusser 1994a: 103ff) In terms of dealing with language two possibilities came about. On the one hand there is the suspension of the linguistic diversity in a single language, as discussed in the text "Língua unica" from 1962, written for the *Suplemento Literário do Estado de São Paulo*. Ultimately, this would lead into a sort of translation, e.g. in a language based on formal logic or in a form of Esperanto. At most, a language hierarchy would be established fostering national linguistic arbitrariness which has to be rejected. The other possibility lies in the acceptance of language diversity and epistemological difference. Both positions are taken up simultaneously by Flusser in the 1950s. Certainly, there are approaches to a translation theory in Flusser's early writings. One of them is based on the comparative and historical linguistics in the tradition of Franz Bopp, which puts the already mentioned method of language comparison and distancing in the foreground - as debated at the end of the text "Wirklichkeit in der Sprache?": "to look for the same problem in two closely related languages, then to compare it to a more distant language." (Flusser xxxa: 8) Such a language comparison implies a type of translation, although not bound to any specific method. It is a prerequisite, which is apparent from Flusser's guidelines for translation

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music arises at this point. In music all dialectics is suspended, since it is the most superb and purest form of language. Cf. *A história do diabo*, p. 164.

written down in "Para uma teoria da tradução".[19] In section 4.1 he states: "Take one text from a given language. Verify its repertoire. Compare this repertoire with the correspondent repertoire of another given language. [...] If the repertoire and the structure of both languages coincide a text in the second language will have emerged. This text is the translation of the first text." (Flusser 1969a: 2) In the end, all of Flusser's writings about language and translation are variations that deal with the topos of language confusion from several perspectives. In my view, there is no qualitative leap between his early and later texts on the importance of translation. It is more about a gradual shifting on one and the same composition of language as a way for dialogue, and for opening to the other. The fact that this composition highlights new linguistic aspects over the course of the exile in Brazil and later in France has directly to do with the need to learn the language in order to be heard and to be able to publish. In addition to German that is Portuguese, and later French and intermittently always English. The point of departure is the situation in which one finds oneself, the existential moment of Flusser's philosophical mentor Ortega y Gasset – 'I am myself and my circumstance' – that creates at the same time a negative freedom, an ineluctable border, which is based on the fact of not being able to return behind the words of the language, since language is the only form of mediation of reality provided by 'conversation' (*conversação*). This conversation constitutes what Flusser calls world, or in other texts 'cosmos': "When I find myself, I am in a structured situation, in a situation structured by the conversation in which I am. I find myself, thanks to the conversation in which I am, in a cosmos. [...] But I know from other cosmoi. I find myself in more than just one conversation. [...] Each cosmos is a realization of possibilities of a conversation." (Flusser 1967: 350-351)

The self-dependence on a cosmos arises from Flusser's synthesis of occidental with Indian episteme. While the Western world proceeds from the ego and doubts on the external world, the Indian thinking goes the other way around from totality to the individual. (Flusser 1963a) In the connection of the ego with the world, in recognition of the relationality between the ego as a reservoir of language threads and the world, the limits of one's own language and the consequent need for translation are set out: "I am not a something, but a how. I am like phrases that occur. The ego, when it finds itself, finds itself in a situation that always includes others." (ibidem: 4) In an existential way, to overcome one's own language boundaries, i.e. to jump over the abyss from the source into the target language, stands for the survival of the ego in other people, which has been explained with regard to Flusser's religiosity: "While being a form of the conversation, I am immortal because the other exists. The others immortalize in myself, and I immortalize in the others." (ibidem) The knowledge of other cosmoi, foreign linguistic and cultural realities, opens up a twofold positive

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[19] Published in the *Revista Brasileira da Filosofia* (1/1/1969).

freedom, namely, the transcendent freedom to survive in the other, and secondly the opportunity to translate, which is particularly given when the cosmoi have structural similarities. That is, according to Flusser, rather the case with the translation of European, inflecting languages than with isolating languages of Asia, which have little in common with our present cosmos. At the time of writing the Brazilian version of the *A história do diabo*, he reminds us to recognize the relativity of languages and realities, and to open up the dubious bridges of translations (Flusser 2008: 91), regardless of what structural provenance the language is. Flusser's Brazilian translation of the devil's book in 1965 is significantly different from the 1957 first German version, because it incorporates the concepts and the terminology of *Língua e Realidade* and *A dúvida*. The book peripherally accompanies his theoretical orientation on language from the point of translation and offers itself a paradigm of his own work as a translator involving the experience of the new context, to which he opens more and more after writing his first Brazilian essays at the end of the 1950s.

With the devil's book I finish with Flusser's reflections on language and translation for the moment, because it is perfectly suited to close the wide-span arch of this text and to return to Flusserian silence, to the ineffable. In *A história do diabo* he namely binds language to the devil. Because in his terminology language is the discursive, linear aspect of time, which competes with God's eternity. But as soon as language has come to silence and returns to the ineffable, something new can arise. Language comes from and flows into silence. Only in this way it is possible to escape Nietzsche's eternal recurrence of the same and Heidegger's notion of chattering (*conversa fiada*).

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