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**Flusser and Kafka: Dialogues on  
Apparatuses, Functionaries and Programs**

“The history of the West from Rousseau to Hitler, and from physics and astronomy to biology and depth psychology, is the history of the atrocious torrent that floods the civilized scene, and of the chaotic devastations it causes on this scene. It is the story of the struggle between geometrical "nature" and arithmetical "reason" against the denaturalized vital forces, and against the instinct of irrationalism.”

(Flusser, 2017a: 264)

In *Kafka*, an unpublished article available in the Arquivo Flusser São Paulo, Vilém Flusser begins the text by situating the author of *The Trial* by means of two parameters, geographical and historical. What he says about the Czech writer could apply to himself, in spite of the cut in his life that Nazi barbarism promotes. Flusser says that we should try to understand Kafka as a "Prague German Jew of the early 20th century". He better explains the meaning of this statement by pointing out the limit situation in which Prague finds itself, by placing itself between worlds that cross each other in the same way that people cross the Charles Bridge, the architectural landmark of the ancient city. For Flusser, “Kafka is a Prague phenomenon in the sense that he is the product of a city located between East and West Europe, between medieval tradition and modern industrialization”. He considers the Jews to be a wedge and a bridge in this border situation, given that they do not belong to neither of the local ethnic groups, neither of the local forms of knowledge, neither to the western of eastern traditions, but a combination of both. From this perspective Prague is the ideal city for the appearance of this interstitial role, that Flusser associates with the Jewish culture of which Kafka is a typical representative.

The bridges between things and times are, in Flusser's understanding, one of the marks of the city where he was born, as formulated in *Prague, the city of Kafka*. Flusser did not like bridges, as he explains in the short text *The bridges*, which opens the Brazilian edition of the book *Being Jewish*. This does not prevent him from recognizing the bridges that connect Prague's poles, to constitute its whole. They are physical bridges and metaphorical bridges, crossing the sinuous streets and the accompanying river dividing the city's poles. In the text, in which Flusser calls Prague a city situated on borders, he states that the river, “with its majestic "S", forms the boundary between the poles”. For him, the

modern bridges that cross the city are inauthentic attempts to deny or lessen the tension between these poles. Thus, they are escape routes. But Flusser identifies an exception, the Charles Bridge, the Gothic construction that merges opposite aspects of Prague (castle and church, hill and valley, royalty and bourgeoisie, alchemy and academic knowledge, etc). For Flusser, these opposites express the contradiction between Kafka's castle and the village of Prague, resulting in a transit situation that links what he considers to be the big and small sides of the city (Flusser, 2012b: p. 64).

This frontier place and, especially, the way in which these crossings of times and places connect with a progressive traditionalist attitude, are also striking in Flusser's thought. His dialogue with the history of Western thought, which appears encrypted throughout the texts in which he notoriously does not reveal his sources, serves as a platform to prospect the future. The landscape drawn from Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein - as João Borba points out in *A post-history of the influences in Flusser* (Borba, 2019: 218) - and also from Ortega y Gasset - as Rodrigo Maltez Novaes points out in *The genesis of Flusser's Generations* - unfolds in a mosaic of ideas that prospect what is to come, in a complex link between past and future. Tradition is rewritten with anthropophagic impetus - as Norval Baitello Jr. points out in *Flusser's gluttony* (Baitello Jr., 2010) - functioning as a support point from which directions of thought are multiplied. Baitello states that the anthropophagic impetus promoted by the modernists results in devouring, by means of annulling the other and incorporating its heritage. This is an anticolonial process as well as a shift from folkloric perceptions of nation (an attitude that is meant to be fought by means of gluttony (Baitello Jr., 2010: 17).

Baitello Jr. considers that "Flusser, three decades later, would rightfully wear the model of a devouring critic, both of his own origins and of the trends and the great international cultural paradigms" (Baitello Jr., 2010: 17). The author recalls that the "metaphor of anthropophagic devouring was the dominant note in the cultural movements and in the most heated debates of Flusser's Brazilian decades" (Baitello Jr., 2010: 18). As a result, Flusser's conversion "to Anthropophagy was inevitable, one can affirm today, even if he rarely mentions it (as he does not mention other authors and inspirational sources either)" (Baitello Jr., 2010: 18).

The link between past and future becomes clear, in Rainer Guldin's understanding, in the way Flusser relates to the Prague tradition of legends, science fiction narratives, short novels and novels. In *Golem, Roboter und andere Gebilde. Zu Vilém Flussers Apparatbegriff*, he states that "an absolutely central role in Vilém Flusser's work is played by the hybrid and interdisciplinary concept of apparatus, located between information theory, philosophy, literature and sociology, which is already mentioned in essays in Portuguese from the first half of the 1960s" (Guldin, 2009: 1). For Guldin, the genealogical root of

the concept goes back to Prague in the 1920s and 1930s, resulting in three origins of Flusser's concept of apparatus: the Golem of the rabbinic tradition of Prague's Jewish ghetto, the anthropomorphic robots in Capek's novel *R.U.R.* and Kafka's opaque and labyrinthine administrative machines (Guldin, 2009: 1).

Therefore, this geographic data is remarkable in Flusser's work, even though he spent a relatively short time of his life in Prague. He left the city as a teenager, in 1940, fleeing from Nazi barbarism, together with the family of his future wife, Edith. He spends a season in London before leaving for Brazil, where he lives for a significant part of his adult life. But the intricacies of concepts such as apparatus and functionary reveal a central European tone in his thinking. This suffocating bureaucracy that Kafka presents in his books has something of realism about it, although it is debatable to what extent the author was faithful to events in his narratives. Not that this is important from a literary point of view, quite the contrary, but to understand the local climate, it makes a difference<sup>1</sup>. What could be the matrix of these bureaucratic labyrinths, in which the law projects symbolic violence on the citizens submitted to it? Flusser identifies in Central Europe a nationalist impetus with a Bonapartist matrix. For him the region, and especially Germany, is the focus of a very specific brand of nationalism inherited from Bonapartism. How does that happen? Flusser explains it in a somehow poetic manner, stating that the "French troops, bearing the banners of revolution, penetrate a complex system of baroque states and blow up the circles in which the bourgeoisie orbit around the sovereign. In this atomic fission they release nuclear forces that have not been spent to this day". This produces a shift in which the middle class changes its attachment to a leader to a devotion to the nation and its military powers (even if in the philosopher's conception this nation is utopic). Thus, nationalism runs in circles, in an attitude of fabricating the very nation it venerates. For that reason, "this construction is absurd, because at the precise moment of the explosion, the sovereign is being replaced by the apparatus, and the baroque circles are being replaced by the gravitational fields of machines and instruments". It is this

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<sup>1</sup> In the postscript to *The Trial*, Modesto Carone alludes to the complexity of the subject in the following passage: "In the theological-existential line, there is a very large group of interpreters who see in the novel the representation of the guilt of contemporary man, since the book does not deal with a criminal trial that takes place before a conventional court of justice. Others, on the opposite hand, dismiss any such allegorical bias and claim, based on history, that nothing is more real (or realistic) than *The Trial*, for the interlude reflects the bureaucratic dehumanisation of the Danube Monarchy. Those who do not agree with this thesis, however, argue that the Austro-Hungarian administration had nothing in common with the images in *The Trial*, besides which the civil servant Kafka's assessment of bureaucracy was not that of an impotent subject before an impersonal and annihilating machine. But there are critics who consider Kafka's realism of another nature - for them a writer skilled in offering, from his specific angle of historical observation, an aesthetically effective and not at all metaphysical vision of what was yet to happen; for this reason, *The Trial* can be conceived as a prophecy of Nazi terror, in which unmotivated detention, beating commands, uncontradicted decisions of the spheres of power, and brutal murder were part of everyday life" (Carone, 2009b: p.387)

shift from romanticism to nationalism that installs the apparatus as a conservative device (Flusser, 2017a: 318).

In *The last judgment: generations II*, Flusser unfolds an argument that these romantic bourgeois will evolve into the petit bourgeoisie in the passage from the 19th to the 20th century. Flusser considers that "the bourgeoisie elaborated its values during the baroque and romanticism as a response to the challenge thrown at it by the emptiness of the world in which it finds itself" (Flusser, 2017b: 32). For him, these values are "artificial and hollow, but they are at least deliberately formulated values" (Flusser, 2017b: 32). Flusser also considers that "the proletariat received these values from the hands of the bourgeoisie, having been uprooted from the millennial village ground" (Flusser, 2017b: 32). Therefore, in his understanding there is a proximity between the baroque-romantic bourgeoisie and the proletariat, who unite around a revolutionary desire. Because of this proximity, the end of the bourgeoisie is also the end of the proletariat. Flusser asks himself "what arises to replace the two classes?" (Flusser, 2017b: 32).

His response is possible since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when industrial revolution promotes the appearance of a lower middle class that aspires to rise in the economic scale and trusts in the narrative of progress (Flusser, 2017b: 32). At this point, Flusser introduces an important modulation of his thought, which considers that progress, in the West, tends towards totalitarianism. He formulates this idea explicitly in *Post-history*, as will be detailed a little later in this article. But the main thread of this argument is one of the backbones of *The Last Judgement: generations*. The book, in a sense, is a long story of how the West moves towards nothingness and absurdity and surrenders to totalitarian temptation as a consequence of its departure from the religious worldview. One of the elements of this passage is the disappearance of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the emergence of the petit bourgeoisie, about which he states: "Nazism, this highest expression of the progress of the West, is obviously based on the petit bourgeoisie" (Flusser, 2017b: 32-3). To conclude that by describing the tragedy of these lower middle class, he has "described the tragedy of that form towards which the whole of Western humanity is henceforth tending" (Flusser, 2017b: 33).

Flusser writing reverberates the *Shoah*, the limit experience of the consequences of this nationalism, which Kafka seems to anticipate when he describes an absurd and groundless world. This limit experience is the historical aspect that unites Kafka and Flusser<sup>2</sup>. In *Unto the Third and Fourth Generation*:

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<sup>2</sup> Kafka died in 1924 and did not know Nazi barbarism. However, his books seem to demonstrate how there is an exacerbated functionalism moving an absurd bureaucracy that, in its abject version will result in someone like Eichmann. Flusser even calls him literally a functionary, in the following passage, in which the concepts of apparatus and functionary, central to this text, appear in a more literal version, still divested of all the conceptual colors they will receive, but which,

*The experience of the Holocaust as Basis for Vilém Flusser's Theories*, Eva Batlicková states that the central theme of *The Last Judgment: Generations*<sup>3</sup> "is the attempt to understand historically the transformation of the values of Western civilization, which ended, in its most blatant form, in the atrocities of Nazism" (Batlicková, 2017, p.5). Although it does not always appear explicitly in relation to the concept of apparatus - which in several of Flusser's books gains a more abstract and positive meaning - this relationship with Nazism is its initial foundation. This tension between explicit references to Nazism and Auschwitz (in the books *The Last Judgment: Generations* and *Post-History*) and veiled approaches in which the concept of apparatus assumes a more abstract feature make the consequences of this Flusserian reading of the Western project extremely complex.

There is a Flusser who denounces the apparatus as a deadly machine resulting from the Western way of thinking and a Flusser who celebrates the apparatus as a matrix of possibilities inscribed in technology, seen as a possible vector for overcoming this way of thinking. Both capture significant aspects of the apparatus, which can be understood as this complex mechanism resulting from the tension between these two main aspects. This article will not deepen this tension, nor will it give more space to the positive aspects of the apparatus, since the dialogue with Kafka takes place under the aegis of this tenebrous apparatus that refers to Nazism. This negative aspect appears in Post-history when Flusser states that the current era is singular, even if comparable to the Baroque in certain aspects. This singularity results from the incomparable and ground emptying event that Auschwitz represented (as well as variations that happened afterwards, such as Hiroshima and the Gulags). Flusser resonates questions that moved the history of a significant portion of contemporary thinking after the Second World War, about how the holocaust was possible and how to live after its horrible destruction. For

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nevertheless, is fundamental to the understanding of its core: "When this bloody flag with the sinister symbol in the centre was unfurled, in the heart of Europe, the unanimous reaction of a perplexed humanity was the following: this cannot last, such abysmal cretinism cannot stand. And the parts of Europe that had not yet fallen under the shadow of this flag reacted with the following statement: it cannot happen here, it is impossible. And yet it could last, it could take root, it could happen here and now. It can always happen, because that is what always happens. It is the eternal return. It is the closing of a cycle. It is the goal of progress. The year 1940 is the goal of all progress: Eichmann, the functionary; Steichner, the idiotic assassin; Himmler, the man without a face and without quality; in short: the uniform covering a body without a soul and without a spirit, but with a monomaniacal goal, namely: the apparatus, that is, the ultimate product of progress" (Flusser, 2017b: 152).

<sup>3</sup> When she published her article, Batlicková referred to Flusser's then unpublished book by the provisional title *Until the third and the fourth generation*, partially available in issue n. 23 of *Flusser Studies*. When published in Brazil, the volume received the title *The Last Judgment: Generations*. It was not a decision made by Flusser who, due to the fact that the book remained unpublished throughout his life, did not propose a definitive title for the volume, despite being dissatisfied with the provisional title. In *The Genesis of Flusser's Generations*, Rodrigo Maltez Novaes states that, probably, "Flusser's dissatisfaction with the initial title was due to the fact that it did not convey the ironic-prophetic tone, so dear to the author" (Novaes, 2017, p. 12). He therefore justifies the editors' choice, explaining that "we decided to change the title, with the concern of keeping the essence of the original" (Novaes, 2017, p. 12). In this article, citations to this volume were taken from the edition published by É realizações, and references to the book adopt the title of this edition.

him this “question concerns not only those directly or indirectly responsible for the event, nor only those who were directly or indirectly affected by it: it concerns all participants in our culture”. The reason for that is that this incomparable, unheard of, never seen and unexplainable event is the peak of Western civilization, on its trajectory towards nationalism and progress. For Flusser, “Auschwitz is the characteristic realization of our culture” (Flusser, 2019: 10).

This relationship between the apparatus and Nazism is, in Flusser's understanding, an unfolding of Nietzsche's thought, taken as a paradigmatic philosopher of the Victorian era. For him, the Victorian era (which had already appeared previously, in an implicit form, in the reference to the petit bourgeois) is the turning point from which Western civilization is heading towards its maximum catastrophe. He states that "Nietzsche did not sufficiently stress the fact that the superman is not man. The same mistake his descendants make. For the Nazis the superman was a kind of mammal to be evolved by artificial selection" (Flusser, 2017b: 50). For Flusser, there is an identification between the superman and the apparatus. He considers that the passage from man to the superman, which Nietzsche conceived as a peak of western civilization, is indeed its brutal reverse. It is an eclipse of reason that lowers the standards of life and conviviality. For this reason, this process that should be deemed as an important step in western evolution in fact results in a totalitarian scenario. “The Übermensch is a product of evolution, and in that sense is a descendant of man who evolved biologically. The Übermensch is beyond Good and Evil, the product of artificial selection, is a cretin, and is beyond the laws of economics. In other words: we of the present day know perfectly well who the Übermensch is, because we commune with him daily, and the Victorian era might have had the same knowledge, since it attended his birth and served as his midwife. He is the apparatus” (Flusser, 2017b: 51).

Another definition of apparatus, this one abstract, appears in *Philosophy of the Black Box*, a book in which the photographic apparatus is taken as a "model for all the apparatuses characteristic of today and the immediate future" (Flusser, 2011: 37). In this context, the apparatus will reveal its positive aspect, which can be understood from the perspective of post-history. The apparatus in history pulsates the vector of decadence of the West while the apparatus in post-history reverberates the powers that technology, in Flusser's understanding, multiplies to overcome this decadence. But it is not, in fact, a question of two apparatuses but of two aspects of an entity that is complex and marked by its internal contradictions. History and post-history, negative and positive aspects of the apparatus, are not faces of a pair, but entangled elements of a flow. It is in the vectors that oscillate in this flow that the faces of the apparatus are tensioned.

As said before, when establishing the dialogue between Flusser and Kafka, the negative aspect of the apparatus becomes more evident, but it is necessary to reiterate that, especially towards the end of his career, Flusser will address the positive aspects of the apparatus, which he understands as an environment in which man can play with the possibilities of the program (a concept that will be developed later on in this article). In this context, the black box is inaccessible not because it is a closed apparatus to which men have no access, but because it is a matrix of such complexity that it is impossible to account for its variability.

An important aspect for the dialogue with Kafka appears in the amplitude that the concept of apparatus starts to assume, in this context. In *Philosophy of the Black Box*, the philosopher states that analyzing the photographic apparatus "is an effective method for capturing the essentials of all apparatuses, from the gigantic (such as administrative ones) to the minuscule (such as chips)" (Flusser, 2011: 37). The typical Kafkaesque apparatus is precisely the administrative apparatus, as will be commented on below. Before, however, it is interesting to recover an aspect of the definition of apparatus that goes unnoticed by those who do not know Flusser's work in a broader way, and that connects the two treatments of the concept. He considers that it is necessary to agree on the meaning of the term *apparatus*, a concept that etymologically derives from the Latin verbs *adparare* and *praeparare*. Both terms mean "readiness for something" and "availability for the sake of something". The philosopher considers that the first meaning of *apparatus* implies "being on the lookout to jump in expectation of something", a characteristic that can be associated with the stakeout of a ferocious animal. When maintained in relation to apparatuses, this conception of an animalistic lurk points out to a dimension of surveillance that amplifies the negative aspect of the *apparatus* from within its positive aspect.

The mentioned passage subtly refers to the transformation of Prague into a ferocious city after the Nazi occupation. In the already mentioned text *The Bridges*, from the book *Being Jewish*, Flusser tells the story of the Saint Bernard dog Barry, who, in the backyard of his grandfather's aniline dye factory, "climbed into the garden and we used to ride him". Flusser describes the dog as "very kind to us, the children". But one day the dog's disproportionate size will take on an unexpected face that transforms him into a beast more suited to his size. When a worker interacted with the dog as Flusser watched him from the bridge, the animal suddenly went mad and bit the worker, tearing his leg from the knee up. As he describes, "[b]lood gushed from the wound, the fallen worker, his leg in the dog's mouth, and us children watching from the bridge". The philosopher did not have any further information about the occurrence but became traumatized with bridges, that for him became a reminder of the sudden transformation of benevolence into cruelty. That tragic accident made him associate 1926 and

1939 and the transformation of friendly Prague into the brutal city of the Nazi occupation (Flusser, 2014: 16-7).

The concept of apparatus is not restricted to these two meanings but can also assume a more general sense of a complex structure that envelops events. This comprehensive character of the apparatus causes a cascading effect, which is suggested in another passage of *Philosophy of the Black Box*: the “photographic apparatus functions according to the interests of the factory, and this, according to the interests of the industrial park. And so *ad infinitum*” (Flusser, 2011: 46). The apparatus is like the matryoshka the Russian doll that brings other dolls inside itself. From the widest to the narrowest, from the macro to the micro, from the general to the particular, it multiplies its matrix logic, which through recursivity transforms society into a machine reverberating the functionality of the apparatus.

The Kafkaesque bureaucratic machine corresponds to the more general sense of the apparatus in the negative aspect. It is a state of laws, as described in *The Trial*: “K. still lived in a rule of law, peace reigned everywhere, all the laws were in force, who dared to fall upon him in his house by assault?” (Kafka, 2009 [1988]: 10). But, arrested for no apparent reason, K. finds himself entangled in a situation where the laws involve him in an absurd plot. Even in detention, he can maintain his routine and return to work, and his hearings are scheduled on Sundays so as not to disturb his working hours. As at one point in the text his lawyer states, “most accused people continue in their usual way of life and are not molested by the process when they have a good lawyer looking after them” (Kafka, 2009 [1988]: 273). He is detained, but the event does not seem bad, on the contrary. The lady who rents for him his room in the boarding house comments: “Well, I heard something, but I can't say it was anything particularly bad. No. In fact you are detained, but not like a thief is detained. When you are arrested like a thief, then it's bad, but this kind of arrest... To me it seems like something wise, excuse me if I am saying something foolish, the impression I have is of something wise, which I do not understand, but which also does not need to be understood” (Kafka, 2009 [1988]: 33).

This incongruity of an imprisonment that does not seem bad is one of the subtle gestures that brings the bureaucratic machine in Kafka's book closer to the negative aspect of the Flusserian apparatus. Imprisonment does not happen as a seclusion outside society, but as an event within society itself. Being imprisoned and participating in the passage of days means that this routine is adherent. It involves men and makes them part of its mechanism. In the Flusserian vocabulary, it functions, and therefore turns everyone into a functionary. K. senses this comprehensiveness of the mechanism that captures him when he addresses the investigating judge on his first day of trial: “what happened to me is only an isolated case, and as such not very important, since I do not take it very seriously, but it is



an indication of how one moves a case against so many people. It is only for them that I speak, not for myself' (Kafka, 2009 [1988]: 65).

At the same time, K. believes that being subjected to this incongruous process in no way curtails his freedom. At one point in the book, when he is talking to the bailiff's wife, he wonders whether he was not "still so free as to be able to immediately tear the whole court apart, at least as far as it concerned him?" (Kafka, 2009 [1988]: 85). This paradox is the paradox of the Flusserian functionary. By being subjected to the apparatus, he suffers from the illusion of being free, despite being curtailed by the limits of his program, as will be detailed below. This is the perverse component of the apparatus. In its transparency and extension, it gives the impression of being absent, when, on the contrary, it is total presence. The tendency of the apparatus to the totalitarian stems from this totality. To go beyond its already extensive limits, it does not amplify its extension even further but activates its power.

At one point in the book the author of *The Trial* describes the machine responsible for his arrest in terms of a large organization, encompassing different sectors of society, organized around its inexplicable machinations. As the painter tells K., "[e]verything belongs to the court" (Kafka, 2009 [1988]: 220), "the court is totally inaccessible to evidence" (Kafka, 2009 [1988]: 221). Everything belongs to the apparatus. The Kafkaesque organization is an absurdly functioning machine of arresting innocents, in what resembles the apparatus like character of the West and its link with the bureaucratic efficiency of functionaries, which will be further explored a little later in this text. This absurd machine is at the same time Western society in its most incoherent aspect (but, if one agrees with Flusser, its most typical aspect) and an anticipated vision of Nazi barbarism, in its aspect of the absurd pettiness of everyday life represented by someone like Eichmann: "there is no doubt that behind all the manifestations of this court, in my case behind today's arrest and enquiry, lies a large organization. An organization which mobilizes not only corruptible guards, inspectors and puerile, at best simplistic, investigating judges, but which, in addition, in any case, sustains a magistracy of high and superior rank, with its innumerable and inevitable retinue of ushers, clerks, gendarmes and other auxiliaries, perhaps even executioners, I do not shrink from that word. And what is the meaning of this great organisation, gentlemen? It consists in arresting innocent people and bringing absurd and mostly fruitless trials against them, as in my case. Faced with this lack of sense of the whole, how can we avoid the worst corruption among the functionaries?" (Kafka, 2009 [1988], p. 70-1)

The only difference is that the Kafkaesque processes are seen as fruitless by K. (but by the end he will realize that they are not) and serve as a motive for the absurd atmosphere of the book, whereas the Nazis' torpid pettiness is not fruitless at all. One aspect of the incongruous situation that arises

stems from the unthinking obedience to the letter of the law, which the guards who arrest him declare by stating, “[w]e are junior officials who barely know an identity document and who have nothing to do with your case but watch you ten hours a day, being paid for it” (Kafka, 2009 [1988]: 13). This pedestrian obedience makes the unexplained things surrounding K.'s imprisonment even more unexplained. This being entangled in a situation without logic, in dependence on officials taking control of one's life, is an intrinsic aspect of the apparatus. In the radical version it takes on during Nazism, this dispersal of a law without explanation appears as blind obedience to the words of the leader. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt recovers the atmosphere of broad complicity surrounding the Nazi final solution, stating that there is another side to the issue of the banality of evil, that is more delicate and politically relevant.

For her, there is a difference between encountering criminals and murderers in hideouts from where they need to be lured and encountering them in the public sphere, playing important roles and occupying significant positions, for example in the public administration. She concedes that the Adenauer government could not be too rigorous when choosing his functionaries after the Nazi era, otherwise they would probably have no candidates at all. But she finds particularities in this functionalism through the example of Eichmann and his trial, “as conceived by Ben-Gurion, with its emphasis on general issues at the expense of legal subtleties” that “would require the exposure of the complicity of all German officials and authorities in the Final Solution - of all public servants in state ministries, the regular armed forces with their general staff, the judiciary and the business world”. Arendt explains that even if the prosecution emphasized appalling and veridical occurrences, they were unrelated to Eichmann's actions and never faced the most crucial issue of the trial: the pervasive complicity of German society with the atrocities of the Nazis. From the perspective of functionaries like Eichmann, they were not responsible for the massive killings in the concentration camps, given that they were only following orders (Arendt, 2013: 32-4).

This non-thinking efficiency of the functionaries is the traction that sets the negative aspect of the apparatus in motion. This logic divested of critical capacity is incapable of recognizing the errors in the diabolical organization of the apparatus. In *The Trial*, the non-genocidal version of this logic is nevertheless absurd. The text explains that, despite the inexplicable situation, “[t]here is no error” (Kafka, 2009 [1988]: 13). The efficiency of the punishment machines is expressed by the effectiveness of even the lowest echelons: “[o]ur authorities, as far as I know them, and I know only their lowest levels, do not seek guilt in the population, but, as stated in the law, are attracted by guilt and need to send us - us guards. This is the law. Where there would be error there?” (Kafka, 2009 [1988]: 13-4).

In Flusser's understanding, this refraction to error is a consequence of the program. He differentiates the computer program from the human “program”, pointing out in the first one the regularity of inductions and probabilities, unlike the second one that in its authentic existence allows itself to be surprised by the novelty of the events. But both operate under the background of a regularity that installs the possible understandings of the world in their systems. For Flusser, the program is the structure that determines the way in which one inserts oneself into the fabric of events. He considers the program as a source of information and as a function of language that structures its functioning. For that reason, the very act of being born means to participate in a structured conversation that corresponds to one's program (Flusser, 2017b, p. 338).

In *Philosophy in the Black Box*, the concepts of program and apparatuses are associated in such a way that it becomes clear how much the program imposes limits but also offers possibilities, with its matricidal multiplying capacity. When dealing with apparatuses as “produced objects” (Flusser, 2011: 38), whose set “makes up culture” (Flusser, 2011: 38), conferring to the cultures of which they are part “certain characteristics” (Flusser, 2011: 38), Flusser finds a plasticity of the apparatus, in the new meaning that it gains in the technological culture that can potentially change the course of the West (but for this he needs to get rid of the negative aspects of the apparatus).

For Flusser, when the photographic apparatus is considered from this perspective, it becomes clear that it is constituted by its program. There is an anteriority of the program which guarantees the transmission of its programmability. This results in a matricidal process in which the products of the apparatus are a consequence of its set of possibilities, in a large but limited scope. The history of language is a history of inscriptions of its semiotic apparatuses and, as it evolves, the number of programmed possibilities convert from virtual to concrete, exhausting its possibilities. But, given the complexity and amplitude of the matrix, language can always seek and find news potentialities. For that reason, Flusser sees a ludic aspect in the work with the apparatus: “His activity evokes that of the chess player: he also looks for a “new” move, in order to realize one of the hidden virtualities in the game program” (Flusser, 2011, p. 42).

The program is the matrix from which the conversations of the men propagate. But the program is also the background that surrounds the functionaries. The thickness of the conversation into which people are thrown at birth (to use Flusser's own vocabulary) involves them in a functioning. They function according to the variables of this field of possibilities to which they are delivered. It is impossible to go beyond the limits of these variations. Nor is it possible to place oneself outside this field of possibilities. That is why everyone is a functionary. The environment in which people live is a

kind of screen that circumscribes the variables of their behavior. In his speech on the first day of the trial, the main character in Kafka's *The Trial*, identifies corruption in the officials who judge him. “- So that's it - roared K. throwing his arms up, the sudden recognition wanted space -, you are all functionaries; from what I see, you are the corrupt gang I spoke against, you gathered here as listeners and spies, you formed front parties, one of which cheered to test me; you wanted to learn how to deceive an innocent man!” (Kafka, 2009 [1988]: 73)

Relying more than would be appropriate on the elasticity of relations, perhaps it is possible to speculate to what extent there is an inseparable link between functionalism and corruption, not in the most direct sense of the word, but in the computer sense in which the system corrupts itself. Flusser has already written that it is only possible to write about the apparatus, from the perspective of the present day in which everyone is a functionary, because there are cracks in the system from which it is feasible to transit through its folds. If the system did not have these corrupted stretches where it cracks, the efficiency of its functioning would be ruthless. Kafka also wrote about this kind of ruthless apparatus, in another text in which the concept ceases to be evocative and becomes graphic, albeit allegorical.

With a fantastic aspect, one of the most direct appearances of the apparatus in Kafka's work is in *In the penal colony*. In the words of Modesto Carone, the "1914 novel /.../ tells the experience of the "explorer" on the second day of his visit to a penal colony located in the tropics" (Carone, 2011: 66). Carone explains that the "play is built around the confrontation between the observer - a European skeptical of the imposed penal system - with the military officer who administers since the death of the old commander the torture and extermination machine" (Carone, 2011: 66). The text describes the apparatus in the following terms: “- It is a singular apparatus - said the officer to the explorer, looking with a certain degree of admiration at the apparatus that he knew well (Kafka, 2011: 69) /.../ - As you can see, the crawler corresponds to the shape of the human being; this one is the crawler for the trunk, these others are the crawlers for the legs. For the head, only this small stiletto is destined. Is that clear?” (Kafka, 2011: 79).

This version of the apparatus differs radically from the perception of the bureaucracy as an oppressive device. In *In the penal colony*, the apparatus is a killing machine, which makes its victims bleed as it lethally scratches their bodies, in a process of barbaric torture. This intervention on the body on the epoch causes repulsion, to the point that when Kafka gives a public reading of the work at the Goltz Gallery in Munich, two of the ladies faint from the impact. The use of the different (a penal colony in the Tropics) reveals itself, however, to be a mechanism in which the author seems to speak

of the near through the far. There is something genetic in the relationship between the bureaucratic apparatus of a novel like *The Trial* and the diabolical apparatus of a short novel like *In the penal colony*. The extermination machine that scratches the body and makes it bleed to death has the same logic of the loom that scratches the earth and, in a contrary way, injects life into its furrows. For Flusser, the loom is a harbinger of the bureaucratic apparatus.

For Flusser, the apparatuses of the industrial revolution (such as looms and mills) are the negative of a new society. The political revolutions of the epoch (in France and the United States) are not mere equivalents of the industrial revolution in which the leader is converted into a device or men becomes citizens. He considers the citizen as a prelude to the functionary. As he explains, the “Romanticism does not realize that the industrial revolution is transforming the state into a process leading to the Kafkaesque *Trial*, and because it is not aware of this, it still seeks to constitute states in constituent assemblies” (Flusser, 2017a, p. 286).

The Nazi extermination machine, which takes over Europe in the coming years, was in its germ as Kafka left his novel unfinished<sup>4</sup>. The Nazi party was founded in Germany in 1919. Its methods of extermination of Jews, gypsies, communists, homosexuals and the mentally and physically disabled resemble the graphic rawness of this apparatus imagined by the Prague writer. *In the Penal Colony* can be read in two ways: as a parable in which the different is an allegorical way of thinking about aspects of everyday life, and as a premonition of the tragedy that was to come. In Flusser's conception, there is no question that Prague is not able to fully explain Kafka, though he is greatly indebted to it. But the writer is a mixture of western and humanistic traditions and local flavours. This is what makes him universal, but also a precise fictionist of local matters. Also, Flusser considers Kafka to have a personal signature that justifies the intensity of his writings and make them almost unbearable. More than that, the philosopher thinks of Kafka as a visionary with an “almost prophetic capacity that explains our certainty of being before a precursor, and not an epigone” (Flusser, 2002b: 68).

The character of announcing the future is spread throughout Kafka's work. His borderline situation, of a man who is born in a world in radical transformation and anticipates the future that he does not even see due to premature death, transforms him into a bridge between two worlds. Recovering Flusser's initial signaling about him, Kafka links a Europe, resulting from the geopolitical transformation it undergoes with the emergence of modern nations, to a warlike Europe, a consequence of

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<sup>4</sup> Kafka wrote the process between the second week of August 1914 and 17 January 1915, leaving the text unfinished, as already on the 18th he starts writing a new story, cf. Carone, 2009.

this same geopolitical transformation, and more specifically of the difficulty of accommodating these new nations within their own borders. It is in this sense that the world of functionaries and apparatuses that Kafka describes does not fit into his own context, as Flusser will explain in another article dedicated to the author, *Waiting for Kafka*.

For Flusser, Kafka inhabits a world that has little to do with the concrete world that surrounds him. This is why his literature will only be accepted in the future. For the philosopher, the questions that Kafka debated had no meaning for his contemporaries, and some of them are only acquiring meaning more recently. He gives two examples: “the situation of parents who flee from the impersonal persecution of petty officials, seeking certain death, and abandoning their children to their persecutors” and “the situation of the man who has lost his individuality and has become a screw inside an apparatus”. Flusser also describes a number of situations in Kafka’s literature that are beyond concrete experience, reason why they can only be understood intellectually rather than felt authentically. He considers them to be grouped around a master situation, that he describes as such: “that of the man forgotten by the omnipotent but lax and incompetent administrative apparatus, a man who strives uselessly and without the slightest sense of revolt to be remembered”. Flusser considers that to be one key contemporary problem (Flusser, 2002a, p. 74-5).

This anticipatory character of Kafka's work happens despite, and perhaps precisely because, he is a defining name of his time. In *The Last Judgment: Generations II*, Flusser will formulate exactly this defining characteristic of the passage from the 19th to the 20th century that appears in Freud's thought and in Kafka's literature, and that hooks into the brutality that the political regimes of the period will exert, for example through Hitler's and Stalin's policies. This parallelism between Hitler and Stalin has not been developed much in this text, in order to maintain the focus on the relationship between the concept of apparatus and Nazism that Flusser so often formulates. But, throughout his writings, barbarism is not restricted to Nazism and reveals itself as something that marked an entire epoch (also for this reason considered by him as the apex of the Western project). Flusser consider this epoch to be determined by pragmatism, psychologism and brutality, in a periodicity he articulates as follows: “The first third of the epoch is predominantly psychological and named after Freud and Kafka. The third third is predominantly brutal and the names of Hitler and Stalin are inscribed on both flags” (Flusser, 2017b: 36).

In *In the penal colony*, the radical authoritarianism of the old commander and the bureaucratic transformation that makes the new commander perceived as weak in relation to his predecessor are a metaphor for the history of the West, which converts its violences into law. The Kafkaesque parable

seems to guess the reversal of this process, which was about to arrive in its apparatchik central Europe. The emergence of the extreme right makes the law less bureaucratic and more brutal. For Flusser, this abject aspect of the law is not exactly a deviation, but, as already said, the very Western project, at the moment in which it abandons the cathedral in favor of an immanent thought: “Nazism is the goal of the Modern Age. When medieval humanity abandoned the cathedral to enter the immanent world, it was in the direction of Nazism that it was headed. By abandoning the cross that supports the Saviour who bears the sins of the world, humanity has already chosen, without knowing it, the swastika cross that symbolises the sins of the world. It is with this subjective and charged with the sense of responsibility spirit that we should treat with Nazism” (Flusser, 2017b: 154).

The two faces of the concept of apparatus in Flusser - the technological device and the disgusting monster - are united in this reference to the link between the Western project and Nazism. But the Flusserian point of view on the theme is not always pessimistic, as already mentioned when briefly dealing with the two aspects of the apparatus in the philosopher's thought. From the recognition that the history of the West cannot escape the eternal return of the same in which it became involved, as he proposes in *The Last Judgment: Generations*, he moves on to an understanding of the program as a game in which the functionary becomes the ludic operator of a field of multiplicities. In *Post-history*, in dealing with *Our School*, he glimpses a power that escapes between the gaps of these not always fraternal points of view. Flusser conceives a fundamental restructuring of the school shifting it from an instrumental perspective. The philosopher identifies an abandonment of the discursive structure of teaching, in favour of a more dialogical model. This change from description to debate corresponds to a central topic in flusserian thought, that of a change towards intersubjectivity, what, in the author's terms, implies a situation in which students will no longer be programmed but will become dialogical programmers, acting onto the apparatus itself. For him, this is the change from totalitarianism into democracy (Flusser, 2019: 161).

The conservative siege that takes over the contemporary world, especially in Brazil, makes it difficult to believe in this possibility of going beyond the problematic aspect of apparatuses and functionaries, finding new programs that the dialogical school invents as a way of reconfiguring the state of things. However, in the dialogues between Flusser and Kafka, the incomparable tragedy of Nazism appears amidst a vigor of imagination and criticism that stimulates the dismantling of the Western world. If Nazism was the peak of Western history, if today we live the post-history, although the echoes of the Western project still reverberate strongly in everyday practices, who knows if processes and metamorphoses beyond the limits established here are not possible? In the words of Flusser himself,

the "program is contradictory at this decisive point. The strategy of hesitation turns out, therefore, to be not entirely negative: slowing down the progress towards robotization, to allow *by chance democratization of space and time*" (Flusser, 2019: 162).

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