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Manipulating a dead world

Vilém Flusser and the clashes with the (concept of) “objectivity”

Introduction

This article has been divided into two parts. The first aims to unravel how objectivity, according to Vilém Flusser's diagnosis, may have favored a worldview and a way of being in the world that has led us to a relationship of imbalance with our planet, highlighting certain aspects of objective thinking that he criticized the most. The second part brings considerations on how intersubjectivity or an intersubjective praxis could compensate for some of the ills of the objective worldview and prepare us for a somewhat more amicable being-in-the-world, ecological so to speak. In his texts and correspondence, the Czech-Brazilian thinker develops a pedagogical strategy – in actions and arguments – in favor of intersubjectivity as a proposed relationship with the world.

Objectivity, or how to manipulate a dead world

Vilém Flusser perceives how the predominant worldview of our time is based on an attitude of objectivity, as manifested in our traditional way of seeing the world as well as interfering with it, including the scientific attitude of research, a gesture that he considered the most revealing in terms of the current crisis of our way of being in the world (2014b, p.43). For Flusser, this is a bourgeois gesture, in which the researcher deals with objects, a set of “inanimate” things, which he calls “nature.” However, “it is neither of the Judeo-Christian ‘nature’ (Divine work) nor that of the Greek *physis* (animated organism). It is an inanimate set” (Flusser, 2014b, p.45). In this gesture, the researcher places himself in the position of a subject that transcends the world, like a god, to read with a supposedly neutral attitude this world, which is reduced to the state of an inanimate object that can be manipulated.

Flusser helps us to understand the origin and meaning of the word “object”, based on its etymology and the example of a stone, which, when “removed from the world of life”, is reduced to the state of object: “Object means “something that was thrown my way,” *ob-icere*, de *iacere*. I fall, the stone was thrown. In Greek it is *ob-iectum*, πρόβλημα (*pro-blem*). The stone is a problem. This can be translated into German in two ways. The stone is understood as an object (*Gegen-stand*) or

as an obstacle (*Wider-stand*). (...) In short, I removed an object from the world of life. Now I'm surrounded by many objects. This objective world obstructs my path to the world of life. I'm surrounded by an objective world. I am subject to this objective world. There are only things, these objects, only conditions. I am submissive. In Latin, this is called *sub-ject*. I am subjective there, in an objective world, and I am alienated from the world of life. This can no longer be called life" (Flusser, 2014a, p.115-6).

Throughout several of his texts, Flusser directed severe criticism at this distant, supposedly neutral and instrumental way of dealing with the world, eliminating its sacred aspect and suppressing our ethical position in relation to the other. These are some of the aspects that will be discussed below.

Distance and abstraction in teaching

A classic rule of scientific research is to maintain a distance from the studied "object" to observe it as a whole, in addition to avoiding interference or involvement, which would impair supposed neutrality. Due to this distance, it is possible to create generic concepts to refer to certain phenomena in the world, and thereby think about them, articulate them and talk about them through language, which undoubtedly brings great advances to human thought. However, we run the risk of distancing ourselves so much from the origin of these concepts that we create, overlapping concepts on top of concepts, and abstracting the world around us, until the web of language that we use to refer to the world is completely closed around us, leading us to what Flusser called "small talk": repetitive, inauthentic and tedious conversation. "The climate within this layer is the closed climate of anguish. Intellects (if they can be referred to as such) do not absorb the information that is precipitated upon them, apprehending and understanding nothing. They simply reflect on this information mechanically, as if they were billiard balls, and thus small talk arises. The information taken from such talk is thrust, undigested, from pseudo-intellect to pseudo-intellect, and is distorted and disturbed during this process. The pseudo-intellec[t]s, closed in on themselves, are a plaything of the information that is precipitated upon them" (Flusser, 2021, p.182-3).

Thus, small talk ends up becoming sterile when it ceases to be open to silence in the face of the mystery of nothingness, of that which cannot be translated into words, capable of causing us astonishment. Flusser states: "An example of the collective aspect of small talk is modern physics. So far away it is from the origins of thought, so dense is the network of language, which is rapidly approaching the vicious and tedious circle of equations reducible to zero" (Flusser, 2002, p.44).

Or, in another occasion: “This perspective that observes objects isolated from their environment of origin can further become violent, so the song of a bird becomes an acoustic vibration, and pain becomes a dysfunction of the organism” (Flusser, 2014b, p.49).

This can be seen in the classical teaching method, in which children and adolescents learn about distant objects, which are so many times reduced to concepts, formulas, numbers and maps. Maps, which should guide us in the world, but which may end up hiding it. As Dietmar Kamper (2002) warns, the images that were introduced as instruments for the subject to dominate the object may end up covering up what they show. This is precisely through a process of abstraction, which Kamper defines as “disregarding the gaze”: “The power of the gaze manifests itself in what is not seen, which is left on the sidelines as a victim of the first distinction of a focusing vision” (Kamper, 2002, p.3).

This process of abstraction is further dealt with by Vilém Flusser (2019, p.10-3), who perceives how the world of four-dimensional life has been losing its multiple dimensions over time. First, the world was reduced to the three-dimensionality of abstract objects, which began to be manipulated disregarding the dimension of time. Next, such objects were reduced to the two-dimensional surfaces of drawings and paintings, and then to the one-dimensional line of writing, until reaching the dimension of numbers, points and pixels, the dimension zero, that is, the null dimension. The purpose of these abstractions is to maintain a distance from that which is concrete in order to better grasp it, however, Flusser verifies a regression in such a process: “Abstracting is not progressing, but regressing, it is a “*reculer pour mieux sauter*”, so that the history of culture is not a series of advances, but dancing around that which is concrete. In the course of such a dance, it has always become more difficult, paradoxically, to return to that which is concrete. Such awareness of the absurdity of abstraction characterizes the climate of the endgame we are in” (Flusser, 2019, p.14, 15)

Today this view that abstracts and distances itself from the objectified world is present not only in research and the sciences, but permeates a large part of our daily relations. We eat slices of cheese and juicy steaks, without having to touch or even face the animal that will give its milk and its life to feed us. We ride in cars, buses and airplanes whose parts were produced with materials extracted from deep holes in the earth in conditions and by people we can barely imagine. We purchase manufactured products readily available on the shelves of supermarkets, or even in the extensive digital collection of online stores, without contact with producers, sellers, carriers and through bank transactions that occur virtually, without requiring even the materiality of the money. This money – as is frequently forgotten – represents the vital time we donate in jobs and projects in which we do not even know what results will be generated in the long term. Abstract money

that we apply in actions, which yield us some numbers, but whose practices in the concrete world we are often unaware of. We stay connected with friends by written messages, stickers, memes and audio messages sent remotely in applications that are apparently free, but that extract vital data from us to pass on to third parties. We relax by browsing websites and internet networks, storing and accessing content in a “light and agile” manner, without realizing the heavy technologies that support them. Thus, by abstracting the origin and process that is behind the objects surrounding us, we become “operators” who serve an “apparatus” whose extent and impact we are unable to fathom (to use Flusser's terms). As the Czech philosopher puts it: “the human mind is unable to understand (and even less to take advantage of) the progress that it itself has unleashed so frivolously” (Flusser, 2002, p. 84). Without an encompassing view of the whole, we are only parts of an “apparatus” that obey its “program” automatically: “It is obvious that the operator cannot choose, given that it is a property of the apparatus. But it is in activity, “it works”, and therefore gives the impression and the illusion of making decisions, especially because we are still behind and we confuse operator with man. And the “high” operators in particular, create in us the illusion of moving freely. But their movements express only the “will” of the apparatus. This “will” of the apparatus is the automatic realization of the project, according to which the apparatuses were designed” (Flusser, 2002, p.87)

Neutrality

Another classic rule of bourgeois research is neutrality. By neutrality, we must suppress any emotion, desire or personal will so that the object can be known in a “pure” way, without contaminating it with our own values. However, Flusser points out the impossibility and even the lack of honesty in this supposed neutrality. No one can search without also wishing and suffering, without having “values”. “Perception is among other things passion, and passion is a form of perception. All of it happens in the fullness of human life, in its “being in the world”. The gesture of a “pure”, ethically neutral attitude is a fraudulent gesture. It is inhuman, an estrangement, a madness” (Flusser, 2014b, p.48).

Further, when researching existential issues that really matter, such as injustice, freedom, wars (or the climate crisis), Flusser (2014b, p.48) considers this sinful and criminal alienation: “The pure researcher who reifies society into an anthill, the technocrat without ‘bias’ who manipulates the economy, like a game of chess, is criminal.”

Such a stance brings Flusser closer to another great thinker who also criticizes this supposed neutrality in order to understand the world: Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Freire asks how we can

merely see a reality of inequalities, hunger and misery without being indignant and wanting to change it. “There are questions to be asked insistently by all of us that make us see the impossibility of studying by studying. Of studying uncompromisingly as if mysteriously, suddenly, we had nothing to do with the world, a world out there and distant, alienated from us and we from it” (Freire, 2019, p.75).

Perhaps it is because we have learned to look at the world from the outside, through images and abstract data that come into our climate-controlled and protected apartments and offices, so that we can hear about heat waves, forest fires, the microplastics found in the stomachs of marine animals, storms and floods, devastated crops and the beginning of a sixth mass extinction, without despair. We are witnessing a sad spectacle, but we seem not to participate in it. And Flusser, fifty years ago, pointed sharply to the “uninhabitability of our dwellings”, our homes pierced by the “hurricane of the media” and our greatest *oikos*, the planet, ravaged by the garbage kingdom.

Instrumentalization

Flusser understands that humankind, in its early days, was immersed in a world of mysterious things that come from the shadows, provoking a haunting adventure, whether in the face of a beast, a thunderstorm, a tree or another person. “In the face of everything that appears, primordial man trembles, amazed, because everything is new. Being new, everything is miraculous. Man's trembling in the face of the thing is, therefore, a mixture of trembling and admiration, it is a religious trembling” (*Urschauder*) (Flusser, 2002, 91-2).

However, over millennia, human beings have domesticated these miraculous things, transforming them into instruments. For Flusser (2002, p.94), instruments are things apprehended, understood and surpassed by the human. Transformed into instruments, things no longer come from the mysterious penumbra. “On the contrary, they are here, before our hand to serve us” (Flusser, 2002, p.92). For him, in the end these instruments are nothing more than extensions and projections of our own self, just as machines are the extensions of our arms and vehicles are extensions of our legs. “The beasts that still appear are dogs designed by us to guard our homes. The thunder that still roars is the movement of the air designed by us to carry our airplanes in their futile flight. The trees that still sprout are raw material designed by us to be transformed into an instrument. And the “other” that shares this instrumental world with us is itself an instrument, being a supplier or consumer, partner or competitor” (Flusser, 2002, p.92)

As such, this word of instruments leads us to a state of boredom and disinterest, as it ends the sacred dimension of the world, since such instruments are so commonplace and do not allow

us to worship anything other than the human work behind them. “The only religiosity of which we are capable, therefore, is self-adoration, narcissism” (Flusser, 2002, p.94-5).

Confirming this Flusserian reading, originally published in 1964, the American psychologist James Hillman (2010, p.90) also understands that the instrumental and bureaucratic view has been making our existences narcissistic and solitary from the moment it kills the “soul of the world” (*anima mundi*). After all, the whole world has a soul, the aspect that animates, personifies and fills all the things that surround us with life, by revealing its sensual face. However, since Descartes, matter has come to be seen as something dead, soulless. And this worldview, which has become increasingly dominant, views all things (natural or man-made) predominantly from the instrumental and price point of view, ignoring their soul. James Hillman defines it as: “A world without soul offers no intimacy. Things are left out in the cold, each object by definition cast away before it is manufactured, lifeless litter and junk, taking its value wholly from my consumptive desire to have and to hold, wholly dependent on the subject to breathe it into life with personal desire” (Hillman, 2010, p.90)

Of course, I am in desperate narcissistic need, not because I have been neglected or still neglect my inmost subjectivity, but because the world without soul can never offer intimacy, never return my glance, never look at me with appeal, with gratitude, nor relieve the essential isolation of my subjectivity (Hillman, 2010, p.105).

And such narcissism manifests itself in an overwhelming way today, thanks to the era of smartphones equipped with efficient photographic cameras, which generated the wave of selfies, endless “photos of myself”. In addition, the modern apparatus has encouraged the narcissistic encapsulation of the relationship with “my smartphone,” making it difficult for otherness to emerge. The capsules of the I-self are enclosed in the clouds of the I-alone. “We live in capsular times. The contemporary is inapprehensible in its totality and, because of this, we have started living on islands, without so-called civilization having developed mechanisms to teach us that we have only one home, the planet. On the contrary, so-called civilization develops ever more effective tools to convince us that each man is his own island” (Baitello, 2019, p.88).

Isolated, closed in on oneself, human beings begin to “instist” and “exist-in-himself”, and no longer for the other. According to Baitello, this would be the essence of *hubris*, the great sin of the Greeks, in which the human surpasses the *metron* seeking to occupy the space of the gods: “Hubris was an unacceptable offense to the Greeks, the desire to be above, like the gods, losing the relationship with oneself as a human and thereby losing the other” (Baitello, 2019, p.91).

As such, when we put ourselves in the transcendental position of a god, only “I” can occupy a sacred place and the world transformed into instruments loses its sacred dimension. How, then,

can we reconnect with the world, in the religious sense? How can we truly care about the crisis that threatens the globe, if we remain distant and oblivious to this soulless world that offers us no intimacy?

Garbage

Through the titanic gluttony of wanting to devour nature around us (objectified and seen as a raw material), of apprehending it and informing it, we are quickly producing an absurd amount of instruments (Flusser, 1963). The biggest problem that Flusser points out to us is that such instruments are not being made to last, to preserve their shape (which should be the goal of culture). In an eagerness to spin the economy faster and faster, we insanely produce “consumer goods”, which are never entirely devoured, consumed, and are discarded in the form of garbage, so that we can “devour” new “consumer goods”. The problem is that this garbage, which we can't make completely disappear (that is, consume), cannot be decomposed fast enough by the worms, bacteria and fungi to become nature again. Therefore, between the realm of “culture” (the world apprehended and informed by humans) and the realm of “nature” (formless, a becoming), we create a third realm: the realm of garbage (a world with worn-out forms, but not sufficient so as to return to being nature). Garbage, therefore, can be seen as instruments (material and immaterial products) that are worn out and poorly digested. Thus, as Flusser (1972, p.44) perceptively notes, it is no longer convenient to characterize our society as a “consumer society”, but rather as a “garbage society”. At this point we understand that we do not live on islands surrounded only by instruments. We also live on islands surrounded by endless areas of garbage (material and immaterial).

In Flusser's (1972) analyses, what led us to such a situation was a male view, which also started to objectify women by making her into a consumer. As a consumer, she is reduced to an instrument that has the function of consuming all the instruments produced by man. It is for woman that man produces, for man does not tolerate emptiness: neither uninformed nature, nor woman's concavity, which must be filled (Flusser, 1972, p.42). Man produces to fill empty holes. Thus, the woman becomes his giant trash can. The male therefore began to obstruct the fertilizing openings of the female, capable of generating and nourishing, with his debris. As Baitello (2020, p.23) also perceives, such a relationship generated an imbalance not only between female-male, but an imbalance for the entire planet, “the greatest female, so-called ‘mother-earth’”.

This critical and unsustainable state calls into question our way of being in the world as a result of an instrumental, objective and male vision. In his text “The consumed consumer” (1972), Flusser suggests that a revolution, if successful, would end with the male point of view, opening

space for the emergence of a female vision (something that is not yet practiced even by women, since even they see themselves from the point of view of men). “And this is one of our hopes, if not the only one we have left: our culture, stranded on the beaches of the fullness of time (that is, in the omnipresent garbage of our environment and our innermost selves), can be saved by a revolutionary reformulation from the point of view of women” (Flusser, p.43).

As difficult as it is to formulate this culture that would emerge from the point of view of women, Flusser makes clear the need to revolutionize the way we conceive the world, which entails a transformation of our worldview. Based on his own analysis of the deterioration of the soul of the world, James Hillman agrees: “Ecology movements, futurism, feminism, urbanism, protest and disarmament, personal individuation cannot alone save the world from the catastrophe inherent in our very idea of the world. They require a cosmological vision that saves the phenomenon “world” itself” (Hillman, 2010, p.108).

In order to transform our worldview, to overcome the merely instrumental and objectified vision that has murdered the world and its soul, it is necessary to reformulate the way we teach new generations to conceive and orient themselves in the world. This requires thinking about an ecological pedagogy, which is concerned with the formation of a new perspective of the things with which they live. At this point, Flusser's pedagogical proposal to practice intersubjectivity may offer an interesting path, since in the environment created by an intersubjective attitude and vision, the concept of “instrumentalized other” is necessarily undone. The intersubjectivity proposed by Flusser, practiced in the exchanges with his most diverse correspondents, may be a way to break the subject-object split.

Intersubjectivity: interacting with a living world

Vilém Flusser (2014b, p.52) does not ignore the strength of classical research, based on objectivity, which results in the technique (which should not be rejected). However, he notes that it has been losing its strength for two reasons. Firstly, because it has begun to be discovered that life thanks to scientific technique is perhaps not worth living. Secondly, because this fascination with the technique began to wane the moment we noticed that it only works when looking at inanimate and uninteresting objects. When we look at phenomena that rouse our interest, which we cannot reify, the technique no longer works so well. Thus, for Flusser, the gesture of classical research became epistemologically, ethically and existentially dubious. “But this does not imply the disappearance of the gesture. It implies the modification of its structure” (Flusser, 2014b, p.52).

From then on, Flusser defended a new structure of the gesture of searching, which was already gaining strength. In this structure, the distinction between subject and object would be slowly abandoned, as it would no longer be possible to say that we are researching the world, but that we are also, in one of its aspects, research of the world (Flusser, 2014b, p. 53). From this perspective, we begin to admit that we are part of reality and that we are inseparably permeated by it, we admit research as a being-in-the-world and with others, who also research and with whom we dialog. Thus, research proves to be increasingly intersubjective and we start to focus on vital problems that affect and challenge us. In such a way, the precepts of classical research can no longer be absolute and deserve reconsideration.

Being in the world

If, by classical research, we distance ourselves from an object in order to look at it in a transcendent position, from the phenomenological perspective, we look at the phenomena in which we are immersed. So, we no longer look at external objects, but at environments. The environment is where we are inserted, that which is inside and outside of us at the same time. We have been permeated by the environment since we were born, through our pores that open up to the world (Cyrulnik, 1997). Thus, to study the world as an environment is to study ourselves in a certain way. And the vital problems that matter most and deserve to be studied, for Flusser, are precisely those phenomena in which we find ourselves, whether it is poverty, hunger, violence in cities, or global warming, and so many others. How could we look at all this without considering how much these phenomena concern us and how much we participate in them? From the environmental perspective, we understand that we affect and are affected by such phenomena. Scientists who study climate change can test in laboratories, calculate and make projections on machines, bringing extremely relevant evidence. But at the same time, they cannot fail to consider how much they themselves are immersed in, impacting and being impacted by such a phenomenon. This is precisely what makes this problem so vital and necessary to be studied, which drives research.

But to understand our being in the world it is important to develop a complex thought capable of capturing the complex relationships that connect us to the environment in which we live, to this increasingly interconnected globe. This complex thought, widely defended by Edgar Morin (2011), realizes how the world has increasingly become a whole: “Each part of the world is more and more a part of the world and the world as a whole is increasingly present in each of its parts”. (Morin, 2011, p.58). As long as we remain oblivious to the many webs that connect the various parts with their whole, we run the risk of losing the human traces that we still retain and

becoming perfect “operators” that obey the program of an “automated apparatus”, unaware of the direction we are taking, as Flusser warned (2002, p.88).

Therefore, in the planetary era in which we find ourselves, it is necessary to be aware of how the forests that burn in Brazil are related to the meat consumed in China, how the pollutants released in Chinese industry are present in the manufactured products imported and consumed in various parts of the globe, how the fuel burned by the cars circulating in large cities and by the planes traveling across several countries in the world affect the aborigines who live in small islands in the Pacific, which are being flooded.

Although it is difficult to measure all the relationships behind our daily actions, it is possible to try to understand the interdependence between all parts of the globe, which, in the present century, has become completely entangled. As Flusser (2002, p.89) suggests, however difficult it may be, in the current stage, to overcome the conditions in which we have been thrown, through philosophy we can at least try to overcome the autonomy and automaticity of progress, influencing its course. After all, a philosophy with such a purpose could help us to assume a more complex awareness of our being-in-the-world in relation to all the other things with which we interact directly or indirectly.

By assuming the interdependence between all beings on the planet, it is possible to achieve a planetary consciousness, something that Morin considers essential in the present century: “The minimal rational demand of a shrunken interdependent world is planetary union. This union requires an awareness and feeling of mutual belonging that connects us to our Earth, considered as the first and ultimate Homeland” (Morin, 2011, p.66).

This notion of Earth as homeland, for Morin, is what enables the relationship of affective belonging to the maternal and paternal substance of a community with a common destiny. The expansion of the concept of homeland had already been radically defended by Flusser, when he condemned nationalisms and various patriotisms during his participation in the *Kornhaus-Seminare* in Weiler-Allgäu, from 1984 to 1991. His planetary pedagogy also manifested itself when he utterly refused to speak in the presence of any national flag.

Thus, this feeling of mutual belonging to our Earth requires us to abandon the perspective of a subject who seeks to transcend the world, as a god, who observes and manipulates it as a passive object. On the contrary, we must see ourselves as belonging to this world, which is no longer seen as an inanimate object, but as our progenitor, as our home, our “*oikos*.” This notion is essential for Flusser, who develops an ecological thought focused on the “scenarios” that unfold on the planet with the great transformations of communications and technology.

Feeling the world: (the aesthetic reaction)

In addition to developing a planetary awareness of our being in the world, it is also important to create a relationship of affection for this world, so that this feeling of affective belonging that unites us with our *oikos* can emerge. But it is difficult for this feeling to arise as long as we continue to see the world in which we live as a still life, an object, something that offers us resistance; as long as we continue to value the things that surround us merely for their functionality.

In his essays of the book “Natural: Mind,” Flusser (2011, p.128) tells us about certain things in nature which, when apprehended, understood and manipulated (instrumentalized), were technically overcome. Like the Moon, which, when “conquered”, went from goddess to platform. Or the winds, which have long moved mills and sails, transformed “from spirits that blow as they wish, to forces that blow as we wish”. And both “sacralities” are theoretically overcome by desecrating synthesis. The “wind” becomes “energy,” the “Sun” becomes “matter,” and one becomes, theoretically, a reversible aspect of the other” (Flusser, 2011p.128).

However, based on the occasions when the wind shakes the foundations of his home, Flusser reconsiders: “Both “sacralities” are overcome technically and theoretically. But not existentially. On certain nights, when wind surrounds my house with desperate fury, I can still hear the voice of “sacrality.” Despite the soundness of the house, and despite the information available to me” (Flusser, 2011, p.129).

Flusser is referring to an aesthetic reaction, when he is willing to listen to the wind that calls, able to penetrate nostrils, mouths and pores. An aesthetic reaction that would also be present when “removing the veil” and contemplating the Moon. Although the relationship established with the wind is different from the relationship established with the Moon, the first being heard (provoking dialog) and the second being seen (provoking contemplation), in both cases we can verify an aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic experiences are a way of capturing and understanding the world through lived experiences, so they offer models to conceive reality. In his text “Models Change” (p.12), Flusser refers to models as instruments that we use to model the phenomena that surround us, in order to understand and orient ourselves in the world. In contrast to traditional scientific models, which seek objectivity, aesthetic models would assume subjectivities, sensations and particular perceptions, offering an alternative perspective of the phenomena in our surroundings.

The old psychology, following classical science’s precepts of objectivity, understands that the things of the world have no subjectivity, interiority or depth. As such, all objects are inanimate, and can only be animated by our particular projections. However, James Hillman's Archetypal

Psychology presents a severe critique of this way of conceiving the world: “Not only does this view kill things by viewing them as dead; it imprisons us in that tight little cell of ego” (Hillman, 2010, p.91).

Thus, Hillman defends a psychology that restores the “soul of the world” (*anima mundi*): “All things show faces, the world is not only a coded signature to be read for meaning, but a physiognomy to be faced. As expressive forms, things speak; they show the shape they are in. They announce themselves, bear witness to their presence: “Look, here we are”. They regard us beyond how we may regard them, our perspectives, what we intend with them, and how we dispose of them. This imaginative claim on attention bespeaks a world ensouled” (Hillman, 2010, 89-90).

To animate the world, therefore, is not to see the things that surround us as internal projections of my own self. On the contrary, it is freeing them by recognizing their face, their voice, their perspective, that is, their subjectivity, their interiority, their psychic depth. Children often do this when they look at the world imagining it. Unfortunately, they usually lose this soulful gaze during the schooling process in favor of a vision that is considered “adult”, which kills the things that surround us, reducing them to inanimate and abstract objects, detached from the world of life. Here it is important to note that this imagining that Hillman talks about does not refer to the dead, two-dimensional images that have been abstracted from the living world by the “escalation of abstraction” (Flusser 2019). He tells us about images with bodies. Because in the *anima mundi*, feeling and imagining are not separate. So much so that Hillman (2010, p.94) questions the psychologies that tell us about images without bodies and bodies without images: “a subjective imagination separated from a wide world of inanimate objective facts”. In this way, it is only possible to access the soul of the world by imagining it and perceiving it as populated by “living images”. This perception is *aisthesis*: “The word for perception, or sensation in Greek was *aisthesis*, which means at root a breathing in, or taking in, of the world, the gasp, “aha,” the “uh” of the breath in wonder, shock, amazement, an aesthetic response to the image (*eidolon*) presented” (Hillman, 2010, p.93-4).

Such *aisthesis* depends, however, on how we gaze at the phenomena that surround us. In the scenes of “Natural:mind” mentioned above, when Flusser decides to let the “wind be wind,” instead of conceiving it as the “movement of air” or the “vibration of manipulable decibels” (resulting from the instrumentalized vision), he begins to listen to his voice and restores his soul. At that moment, the wind is no longer his object, but his other: “The wind is not a thing; it is someone to whom I must respond, it is a You who calls me to be Me” (Flusser, 2011, p.130).

However, Flusser still wonders if he is truly able to hear the wind, as he is unable to simply eliminate the theoretical and technical interferences to which he has been subjected. Even so, he seeks to settle for hearing the riddle of the wind that howls around his house. “The wind howls,

tonight, around my house. I feel obliged, because I know that, unlike the nefarious forces of culture, it cannot enter the house. And at the same time, in spite of that, I try to allow the wind to speak to me. To penetrate me without penetrating me. It is the dialectic between knowledge that closes by objectifying, and the recognition that opens by allowing the other to be. An unbearable situation because it undermines both knowledge and recognition. A situation characteristic of the end of a game, or the beginning of a game” (Ibid, p.131-2).

In this dilemma, a new game begins to establish itself. By admitting that, although meteorologically predictable, the wind follows blind, chaotic rules, without any foundation, that is, without obeying the human will, Flusser opens himself to recognition: “Because the ‘chaos’ that the wind tells me about is not the randomness of a Brownian movement in the gas around my house. It is the howling ‘chaos.’” (Ibid, p.132).

In these beautiful reflections on the wind, we catch a glimpse of an intersubjective perspective of the world where, without giving up technical knowledge and philosophy, we are able to recognize the soul of the world. It is a complex perspective that stitches together scientific knowledge with poetry, philosophy and feelings, admitting openness to the unknown, according to the education proposed to us by Edgar Morin. Through the sensation of the wind and realizing that, although predictable, the wind follows chaotic rules that escape human control and will, Flusser begins to recognize the voice of the wind, its otherness, and once again establishes the line of the *metron*. Flusser eschews the position of a god who knows everything and controls everything, and recognizes the sacredness of the wind. After all, in his text “*Ame teu outro como a ti próprio*” [“Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself”] (1982), published in *Shalom* magazine, the Czech philosopher understands that it is in the recognition of the Other that we can access and love the divine. This sacredness is recognized when Flusser assumes the lack of foundation, that is, the absurdity under the rules that order nature, and opens himself again to that mystery “out of nowhere.” So, it seems that he is faced with that astonishment, that religious trembling that he told us about – that Flusser did not believe it was possible to achieve by simply returning to a naive gaze or through anti-intellectualism, but through poetry and philosophy (Flusser, 2002, p.96).

Based on this perspective, in which *aisthesis* and philosophy intersect and feed back into each other, we no longer see ourselves surrounded by uninteresting instruments, which are nothing more than an extension and projection of my own self, than objects. On the contrary, we live surrounded by various “souls”, various subjectivities and intentionalities, various “Others”, who have their own voice. The Other that is no longer my projection, because it is precisely everything that I am not. And if the Other is everything I am not, not only are humans my Others, but also animals, plants, mountains, rivers, wind, the Moon and even human constructions, such as chairs,

ceilings, graffiti walls, streets and the sidewalks of cities, which cry out for our attention (Hillman, 1993). Including technologies, as James Hillman argues: “The problem is not the technologies, but the gross anesthetized conception of these technical inventions as soulless mechanisms. Because they are conceived in the Cartesian-Christian fantasy, they become objective, brutal and mute. Technical inventions have become numerous repressed slaves, obedient to mechanical laws, forbidden to fail, and therefore we fear them. We want the most out of them at the lowest cost” Hillman, 2010, p.106).

By recognizing the soul of the products (material or immaterial) of culture, including technology, then perhaps they will begin to be produced with more care in order to last? Maybe then they will start to be respected and better preserved (as the objective of the culture should be)? And perhaps this way we can start to take care of all the garbage we have produced up to now, and which also clamors for our attention? After all, just like the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of culture, the kingdom of garbage – which keeps us company daily, cutting the soles of our feet with its shards, infecting our lungs and our minds with rotting bacteria, attracting us with its shapelessness (Flusser, 1972, p.36) – also deserves to have its soul recognized. The archaeological sciences proposed by Flusser may offer us a chance to dialog with this “repressed” garbage in a therapy session.

When escaping from the objective position, all of these Others need to be read and heard with attention and respect so as to “digest” them properly. For we understand that these others are not ready to attend to our whims as soulless and obedient operators. After all, the Other looks back at me when I look at it, and I must dialog with it. In “*Ame teu outro como a ti próprio*” (1982), the concept of Other is explained as including even enemies. And what are objects if not enemies? And it is through this dialog that I can look at the world around me with intersubjectivity.

Therefore, so that we can develop a bond, a relationship of caring and affection for our planet, we can no longer insist on a pedagogy that teaches us to look at the world merely through formulas, concepts, numbers and images that abstract our surroundings. We need an ecological pedagogy that also teaches us to imagine this world of bodies, to perceive it as “living images” full of soul, encouraging us to bring this world of “Others” into our own world, through the movement of *aisthesis*, by looking with interest at the things that surround us. Not only in trees, forests, mountains, but throughout the city, including its wretched residents who rummage through the garbage piled up on the sidewalks, its foul, stinking rivers, its polluted air, its ash-laden clouds, which impregnate our nostrils, our lungs, and the food we ingest.

Few thinkers besides Flusser were, during their time, so comprehensive in looking at the world, illuminating such a variety and diversity of things with their gaze, from houses, cities, worms,

mollusks, fields, valleys, trees, writing, desert, sand, stones (calculi), the Mediterranean, idols (Pelé), masks, apparatuses, wind, settlements, bad weather, perforated houses, media storms, books, carnival, and many others. When dealing with such things, Flusser knew how to establish a dialog not only with thinkers and friends whose ideas interested him, but also with these very phenomena, sensitive to the way they manifested themselves in the entangled world of life and the way they affected him. Much more than manipulating, Flusser knew how to listen, provoke and talk to such phenomena. It was with such a perspective that Flusser was able to offer us such deep diagnoses about the vastness of things and events with which we live.

Engaging in the world: (the ethical reaction)

By assuming awareness of my being in the world, the complex connection that unites me to several other beings, it is possible to take responsibility before my others. And by developing a relationship of affection and love for these others, by allowing myself to feel and be affected by the symptoms that the world manifests, I can be driven to act with passion and engagement.

According to Hillman, the organ of *aisthesis*, where the images of the world we capture flow, is the heart. It is this organ that perceives the face of the world and brings life to things, as forms that speak. This is not the heart of modern medicine (the muscle that pumps blood to the whole body), but the “archaeological” heart that comes from folklore, astrology, symbolic medicine and physiognomy: the *heart of the lion*. This is the pulsating organ, which is directed to the Other, to that which is outside, that which sniffs and brings the external world into itself, becoming one. And it is also the organ of wild passion, love, desire, power, vitality, that drives us to act and to fight. Flusser (1972) emphasized the emergence of archaeological sciences as an imperative of modernity: mythology, etymology, history, psychoanalysis and ecology. Such archeology teaches us to see the world no longer as garbage abandoned to the fate of decomposition, but as a constitutive part of ourselves.

However, when we live in an instrumental, bureaucratic world of functionality and programmed efficiency, our “heart” ceases to be touched and becomes inert. It remains anesthetized, with no more reaction to what it faces, thereby transforming the varied sensual face of the world into monotony, sameness, oneness, “the desert of modernity”, as Hillman calls it (2010, p.60). It is in this desert that modern science and research deal with inanimate, soulless objects in a neutral and apathetic manner. And it is in this desert that so many children and so many teenagers learn about the world.

However, it is also in the desert that the mythological Lion lives, which, according to folklore, is born stillborn and must be awakened to life with a roar while still a cub (Hillman, 2010, p.60). “The more our desert the more we must rage, which rage is love” (Hillman, 2010, p.61). After all, it is the passions of the soul that make the desert habitable.

Therefore, in order to react to the impending catastrophes that threaten our planet, it is necessary to stop anesthetizing people's hearts, and it is necessary to call them to roar. It is no longer possible to educate in the deserts of the classrooms, which tame their hearts, their passions, their anger, in addition to the natural restlessness of their bodies, as noted by Baitello (2012, p.138), with the intention of making them study the world with neutrality and passivity. For Paulo Freire (2019, p.109) neutrality is nothing more than a way to accommodate people, as if there was nothing to do in the face of an oppressive reality, as if everything were already determined, thus exempting us from our responsibility to act, make decisions and try to change. This ends up suppressing our ethical position before the world. That is why he defends the right to have anger, to manifest it, to have it as a motivation for the fight, such as “I have the right to be angry and to express that anger, to hold it as my motivation to fight, just as I have the right to love and to express my love for the world, to hold it as motivation to fight, because while a historical being, I live history as a time of possibility, not of predetermination” (Freire, 2019, p.73).

The education that Paulo Freire defends is one in which the students do not learn merely to verify what occurs (objective view), but in which they also perceive themselves as a subject of occurrence, capable of intervening. We must not apprehend in order to adapt, but to change. “By apprehending, we become able to intervene in reality, a task incomparably more complex and generating of new knowledge than that of simply adapting to it” (Freire, 2019, p.75).

Freire's ideas about education are very close to those of his contemporary Vilém Flusser. At the same time that Paulo Freire (2012) criticized “banking” concept of education, in which the teacher merely “deposits” knowledge in the students’ heads, Flusser questioned the fragmented teaching method, which transmits data from the teacher to the student. The goal of this teaching is the formation of specialists, that is, operators, who actually are nothing more than instruments, as Flusser himself says in his essay “*Da crise na educação*” [“The Crisis in Education”]. As already mentioned, operators simply obey, alienated from the program and design of the apparatus they serve, unable to intervene in their course. For this reason, Flusser (2002, p.88) was in favor of a philosophy that would help us to overcome the status of operator, a philosophy capable of formulating values and pointing out the directions of progress we wish to take.

Vilém Flusser was not only an engaged philosopher, but also an engaged teacher (as was Freire). By analyzing Flusser's correspondence with certain Brazilian universities and with one of

his “pupils”, Heilmair and Santilli (2020) found that, even when he had already achieved a certain prestigious position in Europe, Flusser never gave up communicating with Brazilian youth, either by publishing his handouts and articles in Portuguese, or in exchange projects, lectures, conferences or courses he taught when he visited the country. Despite the difficulties and the events of the world that afflicted him, Flusser showed enthusiasm when he came into contact with the new generations. As the authors put it: “in the letters we noted the happiness that Flusser felt in being with young students, with whom he could share ideas and start new dialogs. It was probably in them that Flusser placed his hopes” (Heilmair and Santilli, 2020, p.107). Flusser devoted his studies to posterity and was engaged in it. He explains this in a letter written to his friend Milton Vargas: “Philosophy must be lived by disregarding (within reasonable limits) the economic, social and personal difficulties that this entails. And to live philosophy, for me, means seeking to give meaning to life through reason and intuition. For the meaning of life is posterity, (the other). I give meaning to my life to the extent that I publish” (Flusser, 1970).

Studying the world, aware of the power to intervene, is a way to develop an ethical posture towards the Other. As such, it is possible to develop an intersubjective look, as it is not only possible to study the world in a transcendent way, but also to understand one’s insertion in the world in relation to others. From there, we can research and learn about climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, deforestation, hunger, thirst, misery, with indignation, with anger at such a situation, and with passion. Such passion can motivate us to better understand the phenomena in which we are inserted to try to change them. Only then can we develop a new and engaged perspective of the world, concerned about the great vital problems that threaten my self, my environment and my Others.

Final considerations

The current sustainability crisis is related to an existential crisis, a crisis of our way of being in the world. And as Flusser notes, the most revealing gesture of this crisis is that of research. The old way of researching, the bourgeois gesture that transcends the world to observe it as dead nature, an inanimate object, is linked to a way of existing that is separated from the world in which we live, manipulating it so that it can serve us as a mere instrument. However, the Czech philosopher had already realized how in recent decades a new gesture of doing research was gradually emerging, one that takes place in the fullness of life, which is vital, and is therefore simultaneously a gesture of aesthetics, ethics, and knowledge. This eliminates the distinctions that separate science from art and politics: “All research is, spontaneously, political, artistic and scientific, or it is not research,

but a fraudulent gesture. Because the gesture of research becomes one of the gestures of human life, that is, the search for values and meaning” (Flusser, 2014b, p.52). This is research that involves *aisthesis* and engagement, which allows one to perceive the symptoms of the world, which allows one to suffer from such symptoms, and which seeks to understand the complex relationships that lead the world to such a pathological state with the desire to change it.

Research and knowledge driven by such a perspective have already begun to emerge gradually in recent decades. James Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis is a clear example of a living science, driven by love of the cosmos, which recognizes the physiognomy of the Earth and the sacredness of the universe. It is a science that addresses the sacred with otherness, which returns the divinity to our planet by contemplating its soul without, however, giving up technical knowledge and philosophy, capable of causing astonishment in the face of the complex physical and chemical relations that give rise to life. It is a theory that looks at the Earth with intersubjectivity, by giving it back its soul.

Many universities are also beginning to open up to dialog with traditional peoples who recognize this sacredness of “Mother Earth,” the great feminine. Ailton Krenak was welcomed to colleges in both Latin America and Europe to talk to crowded auditoriums. His knowledge, as well as that of Davi Kopenawa, has already been shared in books, which have been read by and have moved researchers, scientists and students from various parts of the world. Thus, they can help us to see the disease that we spread around us. They make us realize that the mountains and rivers that we contaminate are not mere goods, but grandfather, grandmother, mother, brother of some constellation of beings that want to continue sharing life in this common home we call Earth (Krenak, 2019, p.47).

And further, there are already educators who dare to take their students out of the classroom to explore the world “out there”, full of life. Thus, these children and young people can feel all of the rivers, earth, trees, streets, cities, people and sky with their bodies, they can bring the world into their pores and into the heart in a relationship of affection.

These examples of knowledge, dialogs and educational experiences, along with Flusser's intersubjective philosophy, offer us some ways to explore in search of an ecological pedagogy. A pedagogy capable of favoring a loving and open look at others, with whom we share our existence in our great *oikos*. However, these initiatives need to gain increased space, from elementary school to universities. They need to go beyond academic spaces and be present in major communication vehicles. The intersubjective outlook needs to permeate the news, entertainment, narratives, artistic spaces that are present in our daily lives, shaping our look at the world we live in. They also need to be in the architecture of cities, public transport, the internal spaces that we inhabit most of the

day, drawing our attention to the sick world in which we live and that needs to be seen and cared for.

Perhaps, through the practice of intersubjectivity, the next generations will be encouraged to look at the world not merely as raw material, natural resources, tools, kilograms of meat, cattle, lifeless rags at their disposal, but begin to see it as plants, animals, rivers, mountains, wind, moon and living creatures, with a face, voice and soul, and with which we are in constant dialog. And maybe humanity can develop love, responsibility and engagement for this world, together with a new type of religiosity, by returning to access its sacred dimension? A religiosity that could possibly encourage us to take care of this living world in collapse.

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