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## Slouching Towards the Abyss

### 1. Introduction

Unlike his better-known writing on media, Flusser's work on design has never appeared in a dedicated philosophical monograph. Rather, it continues to exist in various manuscripts and essays, only some of which have been edited as dedicated volumes published after his untimely death. In this article we consider the possibilities emerging from a post-Flusserian nexus of design, applied theory and language with a particular focus on the descriptive ability of Hebrew regarding the concepts of sleep.

Importantly, design theory is a somewhat new sub-discipline in which Flusser's legacy remains largely unnoticed or perhaps overlooked. This is especially disappointing since his theoretical musings on design and applied theory are of extreme relevance to design scholars and practitioners alike.<sup>1</sup> Flusser's ability to perceive theoretical vistas of our material surroundings adds an interesting layer to his overall perception of the human condition. What's more, his tendency to navigate between etymology, socio-cultural aspects and everyday phenomena represents an almost exact definition of contemporary design. In this paper we tackle two major issues. Firstly, Flusser's ability to cut back and forth between languages as a means to discuss various types of subject matter, which we term the "linguistic chameleon" ability. Secondly the unique trait of sleep – its inability to "be designed", leaving each of us to fend for ourselves, navigating the night's terrors. The two issues are bound together, or perhaps navigated through, in the discussion on Hebrew which, despite its compact nature, is arguably the most suitable language to tackle the physiological (and psychological) process of sleep.

Sleep, although it is a natural and commonplace biological action, is imbued with many socio-cultural traits which other commonplace actions lack. Ranging from our choice of sleeping partners, through the amount of time dedicated to sleep, the time of day in which we sleep, and indeed the location and apparatus of sleep. Before we discover Hebrew's unique perspective on sleep, let us start with Flusser's view of the crucial role that a native language holds over our understanding of our daily routines. Famously, the almost natural tendency to "think through our maternal language" was described at length in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Koerner 1992). According to this assumption, our native language holds an innate base over the very articulation and experience of our socio-cultural surroundings. Flusser also sees the dominance of the native language, as a linguistic ability and a pivotal part of our identity for-

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<sup>1</sup> As we argue in more detail in a book length publication that is currently in writing.

mation: “The culture to which one belongs at birth, which informs us from the “start” (“start” could mean both the awakening of consciousness and earlier unconscious layers) also informs the environment in which one lives, and is experienced as “given.” This culture is both a determining aspect of the environment into which one is thrust at birth, and an aspect of the freedom one has in order to rebel against the environment’s limiting aspect. Thus, the vast majority of people experiences this culture as culture tout court, and the discovery that it is only one among several existing cultures (among all the available cultures) is attained by only a few people. Effectively, this discovery contains the germ of the groundlessness-malady, because it allows an external view of the culture to which we belong. The ones who truly belong to their cultures do so because they never grasped such a discovery.” (Flusser 2017b: 89)

Clearly, this paragraph echoes a classic Sapirian understanding of “thought” as “imaged” by native language (to put it in Flusserian terms). Furthermore, it offers a surprising glimpse of Flusser’s unique life and how his life story was moulded by his Judaic heritage. The Jewish people is made of a plethora of cultures, traditions, nationalities and consequently, an ever-perpetuating sense of conflicted identity. Therefore, what Flusser describes in this passage echoes an almost all too-Judaic trait - the existential sadness and freedom of unbelonging. Indeed, Judaism as an identity is rarely “tout court”, in Flusser’s term, since we are always “one quarter Syrian, one quarter Egyptian, one quarter French and a quarter Turkish” or “one quarter Spharadi, one quarter Polish and half Australian” (i.e., Jonathan Ventura’s or Yanai Toister’s ancestral heritages, respectively). Nonetheless we are all potentially Hebrew speakers because Hebrew script and Hebrew transliteration in the bible and prayer books has for centuries been the only common denominator for all Jews in the diaspora. Put differently, every language is a mirror of an embedded culture, but Hebrew is simultaneously a mirror of many cultures and of none. This offers a unique window into select aspects of biblical Judeo-Christian mythology, notably design as well as the undesignable: sleep.

## 2. Design: A Word Between Languages

It may be argued that while designers “design” sleeping objects and aids, ranging from beds, and pyjamas to white noise machines, the process of sleep is almost, perhaps utterly, un-designable. After we highlight Flusser’s interpretation of “design” we will demonstrate its vernacular traits vis-a-vis sleep and conclude with a speculation on the possibility of designing (and thus theorizing) sleep. Vilém Flusser begins his famous rumination on the etymology of the word “design” with an elegant passage<sup>2</sup> ranging

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<sup>2</sup> Three similar passages exist in three published texts: “On the Etymology of the Word Design” (published in *Design Issues*), “About the Word Design” (published in *The Shape of Things*) and “On the Term Design” (published in *Artforum Essays*). Manuscripts and translations with somewhat different phrasing may also exist.

from Greek to semiotics, highlighting two symbols: cunning (or trap) and the final de-sign: “As a verb, “to design” means, among other things, “to concoct something,” “to feign or simulate,” “to draft,” “to sketch,” “to shape,” or “to proceed strategically”. (...) The word fits into a context involving cunning and craftiness. A designer is someone who is artful or wily, a plotter setting traps.” (Flusser 1995: 50)

However, brilliant and provocative as this English description is, we believe that the Hebrew roots of the words, etched in Flusser’s history, as well as our own, add a less known element to this classic reflection. Let us start with the Hebrew etymology of “design”. Perhaps surprisingly, the word “design” is found in the Bible only once, in the Old Testament, therein it denotes idols, or false gods contrary to the one true God of the Hebrews: “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands” (King James Bible, Psalms 115:4). However, in the original Hebrew, the verse retains another layer of significance: *אדם ידי מעשי יד י אדם*, *מעשי יד י אדם*, *מעשי יד י אדם* or, in transliteration, *Atzabehem kesef ve’zahav maase yedei adam*, literally “their metallic nerves are hand-made”.

Interpreters throughout the centuries have tended to emphasize that metallic nerves, being as they are made by man and not god, are an inanimate material, as compared to wood or wool. In other words, “design” in Hebrew symbolizes a very negative perception, but one which is profoundly different from Flusser’s Germanic-language descriptions of design as an elaborate trickery from “nature” into “culture”. Rather, in Hebrew design is a process of negotiating life from that which is currently dead.<sup>3</sup> Put differently, two meanings are encapsulated in the Hebrew etymology of “design”: the human designer possesses God-like powers; design is always a link between death and life, between dreams, consciousness and logic. We shall now refer to the former in relation to conceptions of artistry and to the latter in relation to sleep.

Searching for Biblical designers illuminates another interesting point. The famous Biblical figure of Bezalel, builder of the first temple, may not have been an artist, as common interpretation has it. Rather he was a contractor: “See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass; And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.” (King James Bible, Exodus 35: 2-5)

Between the lines, we can see that while Bezalel’s cunning works are inspired, he is not presented as being driven by ego or imagination but rather is portrayed as being imbued with godly abilities such as wisdom, knowledge and good workmanship. Indeed, it is the fear of hubris, and with its idolatry, that led Biblical interpreters to accentuate the role of Bezalel as the contractor and not artist, architect or designer. A builder is a mostly functional mediator (or medium) of a plan, in this case written by

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, the same metaphor exists in the myth of Pygmalion. Therein a sculpture reveals a hidden form, perhaps living, from a block of marble.

the hand of God. Builders, like Bezalel, must set aside their ego in favor of the grander (godly) mission. Naturally, the rise of “star architects” and celebrity designers unequivocally demonstrates the Bible’s fears.

Interestingly, the modern Hebrew word for “design” (*me’atse*) is not polysemous as the English word is. The flexibility of the English word (with all its Latin origins), shifting from noun to verb, from action to a description, is lacking in the Hebrew version altogether. A possible reason, then, could be the idolatry connotation of its Biblical roots. Intriguingly, Flusser echoes much the same idea in a paragraph describing the idolatrous nature of design, in the eyes of ancient Israelites, and indeed in contemporary culture as well: “The prophets called this hold over us on the part of the objective world ‘pagan’, and objects of use that have a hold over people as objects they called ‘idols’. From their perspective, the current situation of culture is characterized by idolatry. (Flusser, 1999: 60)”

Could we discern the ancients’ adherence to idols in their understanding of this action as the worst sign of ingratitude? In other words, not only does the etymology of “design” attest to idolatry, but also to our tendency to horde a host of designed objects, because we are susceptible to their aesthetic attractions? Isn’t the cult of Apple-ites focused on the exact same values? Interestingly, the new realities of 2020, on the heels of profound socio-economic and political changes, have begun to influence design and will become more significant in the years to come. Will this signal the rise of the social designer (see Ventura & Bichard 2017) and the end of design as an evocative practice? Only time will tell. In more than one sense, then, Flusser’s description combined with alternate etymologies of “design” alludes to a different approach. A design that will not be a part of the problem, but rather offer new solutions. This shift could be possible by redefining the very essence of the meaning of “design”, a shift in which Flusser holds an important role. Basing this new understanding of design on design theory defines the designer not as a problem solver, but rather as a necessary cultural interpreter.

### 3. Bed, Bible and Beyond

Flusser is well known for his essayistic writing style riddled with provocative wordplay and mostly oblivious to academic etiquette. What’s more, his writing method, which famously started with “an image” that was “translated” into text necessitated a choice of “most appropriate” language, in accordance with the depicted subject-matter. This choice was then subject to further change (that is, repeated translations) which, we might argue, resulted in multiple vantage points on some subjects. This is especially interesting when the subject at hand was an object, a designed-object or a designed type of object (the case at hand in many of Flusser’s design writings), but this is a matter for a longer essay. This essay,

however, focuses on one of Flusser's lesser-known subjects and by far, one of the most confusing ones, from both the linguistic and design perspectives: the "gesture" of sleeping.

In his interesting essay titled "On Future Architecture", Flusser (2017a) remarks that when the human race ceased endlessly roaming earthly valleys of tears it started inhabiting settlements. The essence of this historic transition was the "entrance" into habits: to enter in-habit. To become settlers, then, is to create a set of repetitive habits, and among these activities, we find dining with cutlery, and indeed - sleeping in one's bed, or in earlier periods - on a fresh pile of straw.

The conception of the house as a place of safety, a sphere of exclusive family privacy, is clearly naive, perhaps an almost non-existent mythology. This is why interior walls are an omnipresent feature of domestic spaces throughout numerous cultures since humanity first inhabited settlements. Certainly today, when our "swiss-cheese walls" (Flusser 1999: 81) are designed to afford reception, constant connectivity and "home office flexibility" the sole sphere of solitude remains one's bed. Perhaps the last place of individuality, safety and of *being in the world*, the bed has remained an almost fossilized material sphere where design has stood still. Setting aside all frivolous fashions, the bed is still a flat board, mounted on four legs and supporting an ergonomic mattress. Prices can vary, materials and spring technology supposedly evolve, yet the basic function of the bed stays unwaveringly simple. That is, the design of the bed focuses on a simple object focusing on shifting one's position from vertical to horizontal. It does not change, consider or even acknowledge the very essence of sleep as a unique experience.

Indeed, the practice of sleep involves not only a designed object – a fairly simple surface softened by a mattress, offering stability and security – but also a set of habits. Lying on the side, back or stomach, murmuring, facing one's inner self while constantly shifting our limbs in an endless search for comfort. Aside from our socially imbued bodily positioning in our surroundings (Mauss 1973) much complexity can be identified in this seemingly simple concept of gestures. Flusser defines a gesture as "a movement of the body or of a tool connected to the body for which there is no satisfactory causal explanation" (Flusser 2014: 2). An important part of this definition is the complex relationship between an object and human gestures, which is the very definition of ergonomics in design practice. However, while our physical gestures conducted throughout a night's sleep are constant and repetitive, the bed does not offer ergonomics *per se*. The bed's simple horizontal surface does not offer any curves or varying textures, culminating in the only relevant addition which is not even a part of this designed product: the pillow. Yet, from Flusser's perspective, a gesture is a sign of subjectivity and freedom. And indeed, aren't our gestures during sleep the freest of all? It is a place where we are obliged to remain within our bodies, to face our own reflections, fears and consciousness completely alone, whether others are beside us or not. Bolstered by a blanket, and perhaps supporting a comforting view from the window,

while conquering all corners of our homes, design holds little sway over our beds. Furthermore, as even our gestures are designed by design, ergonomics and technologies, sleep remains fairly simple: we still face our own demons alone. Laying oneself on a wall-less surface, unhindered by consciousness, perhaps this lack of decorum and social constraint was what so frightened the ancient Israelites, propelling the comparison between sleep and death.

The focus of bed design therefore, in all its historical evolutions, is still in researching configurations, materials and style, rather than trying to decipher the meaning of the action the bed is intended to facilitate. Sleep is not only a regenerative physical action. Thus, Joe Colombo's Cabriolet Bed from 1969 echoes a human perception, as old as humankind - the search for feeling safe, secure, nestled in one's familial bosom. As one enters this bed, they can close this membrane and erect a wall of psychological solitude from outside. Cocooning oneself within a fabric is far from being a new approach to design. Appropriately, Viennese architect Adolf Loos (2019) was tempted to comment that humanity's first architectural achievement was to hold a blanket over one's head.

Flusser (2005) addresses cities as a conceptual shift. Instead of thinking in topographic terms we now think in geographic ones. The city, according to his perception, is in a constant struggle to uphold order, facing the climate, the population, politics, garbage and the general human condition. Following the same logic, the bed is another part of a geographic attempt to uphold order in the topography of life in settlements. However, contrary to other materialized endeavors, since the bed is the sole sphere where we are confronted with our own thoughts, fears and hopes, chaos still reigns. This is evident in the postmodern classic simulacra (described in the writings of Baudrillard, Foucault and their counterparts) represented by the hurried attempt of countless chambermaids quickly erasing any human traces in hotel beds by placing a triangular miniature chocolate on the bed as if to symbolize their victory over personal chaos and individuality.

To this end, tents should not be perceived as mobile homes, but as a materialization of a different experience of housing. Flusser highlights the stupidity of tents, as a human attempt to conquer the elements by thinking askew, since sails or kits would be a better example of succeeding in this task, rather than tents. However, his interest rises when comparing tents with houses: "Thus a house, like the cave from which it derives, is a dark secret (like that 'secret place of the heart', a home), and a tent, like a nest in a tree, of which it is a descendant, is a place where people assemble and disperse, a calming of the wind. In a house, things are possessed; it is property, and this property is defined by walls. In a tent, things are experienced; it assembles experience, and this experience is subdivided and diversified by means of the tent wall." (Flusser 1999: 56)

The cave trope, as contrary to the lofty treetop is very popular in psychoanalytic writings, yet, in Flusser's case the idea of ethics regarding the stifling almost authoritarian presence of walls stands in

stark contrast with the sheltering tenderness of the woven fabric. Indeed, when deciphering the cradle as a material artifact, we can see the necessity for physical shelter, despite the flexibility of a mother's glance through the woven wicker sides of this miniature shelter. In fact, Gaston Bachelard famously described the importance of the feeling, architectural or imaginary, of "nesting", associated with his call to return to daydreaming as an active choice. Bachelard (1994: 98) associates this material and ephemeral feeling with simplicity, warmth and security: "A nest, like any other image of rest and quiet, is immediately associated with the image of a simple house. When we pass from the image of a nest to the image of a house, and vice versa, it can only be in an atmosphere of simplicity." Albeit linear and psychoanalytical in nature, Bachelard's description resonates with the essence of Flusser's intriguing dive into a Heideggerian being of the bed. Before delving into the socio-material aspects of this fundamental object, let us savour this description: "I sleep. Tomorrow I shall return to myself. Where am I now? In bed, of course, but I am waiting for myself there. I am beside myself. Where? I fall asleep. I know that I fell, because I let myself fall. I know that I shall be back, because I shall be called. But there is an abyss between these two knowings. I cannot speak about that abyss, because I am beside myself whilst I cross it. I am in bed whilst I cross that abyss. I am not present at it. Nor absent. I do not lose myself in the abyss, nor do I find myself there. I cannot speak of the abyss. May I sing it? Oh abyss that is at the bottom of my bed. Oh abyss that is the foundation of my dwelling." (Flusser n.d.: 3)

The terseness of Hebrew renders this translation devoid of its echoes of Dante, Lovecraft, and St. Augustine. The Greco-Catholic aura of primordial sin, of endless fear and the hope of salvation, echoes the Talmudic description of sleep as the "small death", yet the richness of this description would only have been possible in English. Once more, we arrive at the intersection between functional design, focused on solving problems, and the more elaborate approach focusing on design as interpretation. While the former relies heavily on function, the latter explores various experiences and situations stemming from and influenced by design. More concise and technical in nature, Hebrew is better suited to the classic approach than the more innovative one. Yet, with his linguistic ability, Flusser highlights these differing possibilities. In Hebrew this reads as follows: "Ani yashen. Machar echzor le'atzmi. Eifo ani achshav? Ba'mita, carnuvan, aval ani me'chake le'atzmi sham. Ani le'tzidi. Eifo? Ani nirdam. Ani yodea she'nafalti, mi'shum she'natati le'atzmi lipol. Ani yodea she'achzor, mishum she'yikreu li. Ulam, yesh'na tehom bein shtei ha'yediot ha'ele. Ani lo yachol le'daber al ha'tehom, mishum she'ani le'tzad atzmi kshe'ani chotze ota. Ani ba'mita kshe'ani chotze et ha'tehom. Ani lo nochach ba. Gam lo ne'edar. Ani lo holech le'ibud ba'tehom, gam lo motze et atzmi be'tocha. Ani lo yachol letaber al ha'tehom. Ha'im uchal lashir ota? Ho tehom ha'shochenet be'tachtit ha'mita. Ho tehom she'hi ha'basis shel kiyumi."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Our translation.

In Hebrew, the phonetics and the Semitic syllabification of the language, even without understanding the words, rob this poetic and languid description of its innate English beauty. Nevertheless, the heart of this text, pivoting as it does on the word “abyss”, carries with it the various Hebrew meanings of *tehom* (תְּהוֹם), ranging from the fear of sinning, to Kabbalistic ascension and everything in between. Here, the mysteries of sleep and death dominate the poetics of elliptical descriptions.

Conversely, while focusing on function, ergonomics, market-value and even sustainability and creature comforts, contemporary design lacks the inner conviction to tackle these deeper, almost ephemeral traits of sleep. How can design offer solace to those fearing sleep’s close encounter with death? How can design infuse the cultural attributes of sleep with philosophical or theological knowledge? However, a Flusserian theory of design can offer this bridge, as we saw in the passages quoted above. Furthermore, as an almost visual writer, Flusser’s writings could trigger practical avenues into the intricate visual-material interpretation of sleep. Flusser echoes various cultural traits, ranging from musical variations of the Requiem, through Catholic pre-conventions, to Hamlet’s famous “To die, to sleep – to sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there’s the rub, for in this sleep of death what dreams may come...”: “My decision to sleep is a choice: it accepts one possibility and refuses all others. Having chosen sleep I gain something and I lose something. What do I gain? Nothing. I gain the nothing. I gain the ocean of annihilation, the overcoming of weight, the pause, “epoche”, “quiem in pace”. What do I lose? Everything. Myself, my world, my power of decision and the field where decisions are made. I lose my freedom and my dignity. To fall asleep is the decadence of dignity. I am undignified whilst I sleep.” (Flusser n.d.: 3)

The difference between Shakespearean English and Biblical Hebrew is striking. Consider the possibility of proclaiming “I gain the nothing”, when nothing is impossible since nothing is devoid of the presence of God. In fact, apart from the various cultural echoes, that is to say the very essence of sleep as the loss of control or rather the gaining of absolute freedom, the phonetics of the paragraph are jarring when comparing English to Hebrew. Just consider the elegance of “the decadence of dignity”, versus “*le’hiradem ze ha’shchitut she’ba’gadlut*”. The ebb and flow of English verily mirrors languid sleep amidst soft cushions. Flusser continues in a beautifully crafted dreamlike depiction, spanning almost the whole of psychoanalytic theory in the last 120 years. Facing the fear of death, the alluring call to forget, to let go, pseudo-suicidal freedom mixed with Greco-Catholic myths and dogmas are all a part of this dreamscape: ““The entrance to the abyss is veiled, and I can lift the veil or I can tear it. The veil of dreams. I do not want to tear it (to analyze it). I want to look at it. Now it is something, now it is nothing, now it is a world, now it is it no longer, because it is still me, but I am still it. I and the world, extreme dreams, limited cases of dreams. Wake world of the wake I: dreams farthest removed from sleep. Wake world of the wake I, extreme alienation. Having the veil of dreams before one’s eyes, hav-



ing before one's eyes the incredible fact that one can dream, is there any sense in trying to think ontologically? To try and distinguish between reality, (or various realities), and dreaming?" (Flusser n.d.: 4)

Setting aside the myriad, almost dazzling, allusions to various theoretical classics, ranging from Jung to Kabbalistic principles (the veil, the abyss), the linguistic content of this description once more highlights a unique ability to correlate language and subject matter. Just consider the beauty of the phrase "extreme dreams". The echoing sounds, engulfing deeper meanings, are in this case untranslatable. Here, Hebrew, a lean and stringent language, resurrected and struggling as it will forever remain, lacks the scope to translate rich and imaginative phrasing of this kind. Appropriately, Flusser enfolds whole psychological and sociological disciplines, in a few brief, sometimes cyclical phrases, alluding to self and identity formation theories: "We shall die, each of us for himself, in our inescapable loneliness, the "you" and the "I", that is mortal. We are immortal, and death has no power over us. We overcome death, because we are "we". But we are "we" only for fleeting moments like this one. In this normality of daily life, our "we" is full of "Is" and "Yous". (Flusser n.d.: 5)

Apart from the disciplines mentioned above, coupled with the various cultural-religious attributes of death, the Hebrew connotation is almost automatic to those of us raised in religious education institutes. Famously, the Jewish Talmud describes sleep as 1/60 of death and a dream as 1/60 of prophetic ability (see Talmud Bavli, Brachot 57:2). In other words, the very action of sleep is replete with not only tropes or metaphor, but with an actual transcendence of our consciousness. Terrifying or comforting, depending on one's set of beliefs, yet the actual design of the object of sleep stays constant, rigid, almost stoic in its simplicity, offering nothing, but lumbar support. However, when Flusser delves into the uneasiness of sleep, into the pains and ailments, alongside the necessity to induce a drugged sleep, fighting insomnia, he creates another dazzling display of phraseology. Flusser ranges from Shakespeare ("to bed, to bed, to bed"), Thomas Aquinas and more importantly from our point of view, the anthropology of the body, Marcel Mauss and the "sick role", the fractured body, illogically fighting an elusive, indescribable disease, lies in a materially defined, cloistered flat surface. Any slumberer may unintentionally step into the unavoidable abyss where the hug of a half-brother awaits<sup>5</sup>: "Death bed. Agony. That thing over there in the bed, that object of mine, does not seem to want to be it. Desperately it does not want to be a thing. Well, this is the death of the other one. Theatre of the absurd. Very bad theatre at that. Cheap, because it provokes sympathy and fear in a primitive form." (Flusser n.d.: 6)

As before, an almost endless variation of theories and connotations flow from this text yet it suffices to pinpoint two examples which highlight what could have been achieved had Hebrew been used here. Firstly the elegant use of "death bed", avoids the binding hyphen between the two words. This does open another array of possible interpretations in English, but we doubt whether these are as

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<sup>5</sup> This is a reference to John William Waterhouse's 1874 painting *Sleep and His Half-Brother Death* wherein Hypnos and Thanatos (based on Waterhouse's own brothers), are depicted on the same bed, Thanatos' arm held around Hypnos'.

rich and troubling as those that exist in Hebrew. In Hebrew, מיטה (*mita* = bed) and מיתה (*mita* = death) are homonyms, thus raising the possibility that a bed is in itself a form of death and also a place where death might occur. Secondly, the use of “that thing” is once more very different in meaning from its Hebrew translation. The word *davar* in Hebrew (דבר) could mean “thing”, but its three-letter Semitic root stems from the verb “to speak”, taking the reader to a completely different connotation. Furthermore, in design theory, the use of “thing” alludes to thing theories, material culture and the very essence of design as a verb and a noun.

#### 4. Conclusion

The tale told in this short article is a stratified narrative. Its layers go from top to bottom or bottom to top, depending on one’s vantage point: Vilém Flusser, Judaism, Hebrew, Sleep and Design. However, irrespective of one’s position, Hebrew offers a key to the concepts embedded in all the other layers. Of course, it is not an exclusive key but it is unique nonetheless. Involuntarily minimalistic in its nature, all-too-often devoid of richer connotations when translated, Hebrew offers its own tropes and connotations. False idols, the potholes in our own egos, the constant brush with death as we lay our heads on the pillow at night, are all qualities Hebrew inherited from Judaism. As a linguistic chameleon, Flusser used these qualities and juggled them time and again. While Hebrew also has something to say about Flusser and Judaism, the following lines, in bringing this article to a close, will share a final Hebrew insight concerning the concept of sleep and how it pertains to the future of design and design theory. Notably, the concept of “sleep” in Hebrew alludes to Judeo-Christian theology, depicting the constant struggle of the believer standing on the threshold between resurrection, salvation and the ultimate abyss of sin. Being a situation described as 1/60 of death, sleep is one of the very few activities that a person performs completely alone. It is, in that, a modest reminder and perhaps a necessary rehearsal of the final journey we shall all eventually take in solitude. Astonishingly, the etymology of design in Hebrew alludes to a similar idea separating life and death, whilst simultaneously binding them together. A designer then, is neither an ego-less creator (a builder) nor an ego-driven creative (an artist). Similarly, the designer is not only a trickster, a prophet or the dreamer Flusser’s Germanic-language manuscripts propose. When translated into Hebrew, or written in it, the designer is, or rather could be, a mediator, a facilitator and a bridge between the self and the selfless, between individual experiences and the experience of non-individuality. One way designers might become just that is by placing their attention, sensitivity and creativity on designing the ultimate and perhaps only ‘un-designed’ physical action: sleep.

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