

Anke Finger

Edith Flusser Remembered

When I met Edith for the first time – I don't recall when, perhaps in 2005 or 2006, in Berlin or at the Germersheim conference – I was first, oddly, struck by her hair. It was the most fascinating construction of determined chaos, with strands of differing thickness moving in this and that direction, untamed, but somehow bent into shape such that the impressive mass she still called her own sat on top of her head in the form of a nest that seemed both immensely comfortable and inviting while truly awesome.

The first several moments of our encounter, I fully expected, slightly nervous, that this woven 3-dimensional wonder would all begin to wobble and haplessly dissolve in a matter of moments... Of course, no such thing occurred. Her hair was as strong and complex and fun and unruly as Edith herself. And it occurs to me now, in 2014 and focusing my thoughts on a woman who in her late 80s could appear to be 18, that Edith very much resembled, in a way, the hair she so prominently and resolutely balanced on her head every day. At least I'd like to strike this analogy since I never experienced her as the translator of her late husband's work, the keeper and organizer of his papers, or the woman of the world she was. I met her in her last years when she told me more about her girlhood, especially during a set of interviews I conducted in 2007, than about her adult years. She giggled when she talked, with ease and delight, but her giggle was laced, too, with many of the bitter and blunt experiences that marked an intense life. And she very much seemed to enjoy bouncing around in her early memories just as if to revivify the young woman who bounced around Prague or on horseback or on skis in the Alps.

Why would she welcome a perfect stranger – more of a grandchild's generation – into her life and into her home? She, Dinah and Benjamin lived on Broadway in New York City, near Lincoln Center, a busy section on the lower part of the upper West Side, where opera singers and dancers met with a diverse restaurant culture, tons of tourists, and the international party jet set. Once, though, you made it to the 21st floor – and I made it numerous times in these last years – you were met with the most comfortable and inviting nest New York City had to offer. Edith embraced you, enveloped you, with her warmth, openness and a fresh curiosity about your life and the world as if you had just returned home from an Odyssey. You were home with a stranger who never felt like one. It is a gift I admired most about her.