Conference 2020
Vilém Flusser and His "Languages"

Vilém Flusser and His "Languages"

2020 is the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Czech-Brazilian cultural theorist and philosopher Vilém Flusser (1920–1991). On this occasion, the aim of this two-day conference is to bring emerging and experienced artists and scholars together in order to discuss Flusser's ideas and concepts on language and his philosophy of language. Flusser is relatively well known for his media theoretical concepts such as the telematic (or network) society or technical images, but less known for his deliberations on the philosophy of language.

Many thinkers also separate two main periods in Flusser's oeuvre: 1) his early years in Brazil, when he developed his thought on languages; and 2) his later years in Europe, focussing on media and communication theories. Our event sees these phases not as divided stages of Flusser's work, but instead, as continuous developments and results of his thought as there are important correlations between them. E.g. Flusser's cybernetic arguments in his famous book Into the Universe of Technical Images (1985) can be traced back to his early work Language and Reality (1963).

Flusser wrote intensively in four languages: German, Portuguese, English, and French. However, he always rewrote and retranslated his texts from one language into another in order to complete a cultural translation in his own way. His style of writing is considered radically non-academic, essayistic, and artistic. He was a master of short essays that quickly come to the point and sometimes have an unexpected ending. Many scholars see his way of writing and thinking as a specific method of language use (e.g. Guldin 2016, Mozzini 2015) that is often considered as his own artistic practice (Marburger 2016). Therefore, in the title of the conference, we use "languages" to refer to Flusser's individual way of playing with (and against) the limited tools of languages.

Therefore, we invited artists and scholars to submit abstracts about their research or artistic work related to the theme of the conference and we selected 18 presentations. Moreover, there will be two keynote presentations, and a virtual exhibition with six artists.

Dr. Anita Jóri, Research Associate
Vilém Flusser Archive

Programme Day 1 29 June 2020

13:45-14:00 Opening by Steph Holl-Trieu, Anita Jóri and Hana Yoo

14:00-14:50 **The Limits of Translation** (chair: Anita Jóri)

Marc Lenot (FRA) – Für eine Philosophy of Caixa Preta: a text in three languages

Uriel Kon, Yanai Toister, Jonathan Ventura (ISR) – Design(ing) Flusser in(to) Hebrew

William Hanff (USA) – Fiktions des Wissenschaft – Is Science Fiction Translatable? or is Translation a Science Fiction?

15:00-16:00 **Correspondências** (chair: Michael Hanke)

Gabriel Philipson (BRA) – Seismic Cyst: Vilém Flusser's Journalistic Philosophical Quasi-Poetry and Oswald de Andrade's Telefonemas in the Corpus of Brazilian Philosophy

Bárbara Sesso Carneiro (BRA) – Vilém Flusser, Theon Spanudis: their languages

Isabel Löfgren (SWE) – This is Why I am in Europe: Flusser's letters about the "communicological turn" of the 1973 XII São Paulo Biennale

Keynote I: Daniel Irrgang (DE) – Reversing the vectors of meaning. The diagrammatic language of Vilém Flusser

Virtual Exhibition
Cristina Achury (COL) – Anti-Archive
Pablo-Martín Córdoba (FRA) – L'inter-code
Alice Dalgalarrondo (BRA) – Al Zahir
Maria Lalou (NLD) – Camera and The Mirror
Elisa Storelli (CHE) – Temporal Clusters
Hana Yoo (KOR) – Muju

Programme Day 2 30 June 2020

17:00-17:50 **Amplified language** (chair: Hana Yoo)

Karla Brunet (BRA) – A Talk on Antarctica Tempo

Kyle P. Booten (USA) – Language Models and Models of Experience: Flusser and Computer-Mediated Writing

Maria Lalou (GRC/NLD) – Virtual Presence

Keynote II: Martha Schwendener (USA) – Art and Language in Vilém Flusser's Brazil

18:00-18:50 **Vampyroteuthis infernalis: Le vampire des abysses** (chair: Steph Holl-Trieu)

Elise Rigot (FRA) – Vampyroteuthis as a bioluminescent lighthouse to think under the livings. Some mutations: From 1981 to 1991

Zhao Lu (CHN) – A Comparative Research Between Flusser's Science Fiction and Chinese Philosopher Chuang Tzu' s Animal Allegory

Karen Tei Yamasitha (USA) – Manifesto Anthrobscene

Ruth Hsu (USA) – Vampyroteuthis Infernalis: Homo sapien's posthuman future?

19:00-19:50 **Angenommen** (chair: Daniel Irrgang)

Michael Hanke (DEU/BRA) – The dialectics of continuity and new focusses – Vilém Flusser's way from language philosophy to communication and media theory

Eckhard Geitz (DEU) – Flusser's psychology. The connection between his language philosophy and media theory

Alexander Schindler (AUT) – Questioning Causation. A fictional dialogue between Vilém Flusser and John Dewey

19:50-20:00 Closing by Steph Holl-Trieu, Anita Jóri and Hana Yoo

Vilém Flusser and His "Languages"

Conference Presentations

Language Models and Models of Experience: Flusser and Computer-Mediated Writing

Kyle Booten

In Does Writing Have a Future?, Flusser positions writing itself at the boundary of human and machine intelligence. Since all writing is merely the placing of letters into tidy rows—an inherently mechanical activity—he predicts that we will soon "leave writing, this ordering of signs, to machines." Today the statistical language models of machine learning systems can both read and write text with impressive fluency, and so Flusser's deflationary vision of "grammar machines" has in some sense come to pass. Still, his vision of writing's future is incorrect in one respect: we have not left writing to the machines. More often we now write with—or, rather, under the supervision of—machine learning algorithms. Usually these algorithms fulfil utilitarian ends, balking at irregular grammar or flagging social media posts as offensive.

What other relationships can we broker with the algorithmic minders of human writing? This talk, given from the perspective of a practitioner of computational poetics, will consider the status of the statistical language model in light of a different sort of "model." For Flusser, the role of the poet is to generate "models of experience" that allow us to perceive new phenomena within the world. Statistical language models are also models of experience, inviting us to perceive the world only as quantifiable and correlatable phenomena. On the one hand, writing with/against language models opens up a space for critiquing algorithms by finding places where their understanding of language fails. On the other, verse-makers have long given over their minds to the quasi-algorithmic strictures of forms (e.g. the sonnet), so perhaps verse-making can help us to discover ways of thriving under the oppressive architectures of contemporary computation. These possibilities will be tested through literary experimentation; demonstration will be provided of techniques of writing with and against the supervision of statistical language models, such as those that judge the sentiment of a particular text or estimate how likely it is to be from the oeuvre of a certain author.

Antartica Tempo is an audiovisual performance about my subjective observations during a 60-day expedition to Antarctica. The language portrayed here is the technical image; the remix of this imagined place and tempo. It is a mix of codes – software and language – trying to translate the lived experience in this faraway location. Images, sounds and voices are processed and edited in real-time. They are about the cold, the endless day, the rough sea, the seasickness, the dangerous drake, the boredom, the confinement, the beautiful and eccentric landscapes, the underwater, the cold water, the lack of possibility to walk around and Brunet's body in a different environment. Besides the environmental issues, it is also about being in a military environment, about following rules, having someone organize your routine (when you eat and what you eat), about hierarchy and behaving in accordance with their timing. Antarctica Tempo is about the tempo there, the pace in this icy continent. It is also a reference to the word tempo in Portuguese which means time but also the weather. During the expedition I frequently heard that Antarctica is about Tempo – pace, patience, timing and weather. This "tempo" was what defined my days in Antarctica.

Kyle Booten is a postdoctoral researcher in the Neukom Institute for Computational Science at Dartmouth College, USA. His research and creative works have appeared or are forthcoming venues such as Boston Review, Fence, Lana Turner, electronic book review, and the proceedings of the International Conference on Computational Creativity.

Karla Brunet is an artist and researcher, Ph.D. in Audiovisual Communication and MFA in Photography. She has participated in exhibitions in Europe, Middle East and America. Karla is a professor at IHAC/UFBA and coordinates the Ecoarte, an interdisciplinary research/art group. Her art practices involve photography, video art, data visualization, hybrid art, audiovisual performance, webart, mapping art, and gaming.

Vilém Flusser, Theon Spanudis: their languages

Bárbara Carneiro

Vilém Flusser and Theon Spanudis were both immigrants in São Paulo in an effervescent moment of the city. Theon Spanudis was a Greek-Brazilian art collector, poet and psychoanalyst, whose personal documents and works of art were donated to the University of São Paulo. Archival letters from the Vilém Flusser Archive at Universität der Künste Berlin and from Theon Spanudis at Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros bear witness to their shared dialogue and attest the relevance of language not just in their work but also in their social environments. The exchange of letters appears to have started in the year of 1976, when Flusser had already returned to Europe. Most of the documents were written in German. But this was no exception to the social circle they frequented while in São Paulo. Both Flusser and Spanudis befriended the artists Mira Schendel, another immigrant, and Niobe Xandó – the Brazilian painter married to Alexander Bloch, the Czech philosopher to whom Flusser dedicates a chapter in his autobiography "Bodenlos". Language was the medium but also the content of their letters. Language – especially German – carved out the space in which the social manifested. This presentation aims to investigate how languages influenced the presence of these two figures in the Brazilian cultural scene and how they explored language through self-translation, textual experimentation and theoretical writing.

Bárbara Sesso Carneiro has a master degree in Brazilian Identities and Culture at Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros of University of São Paulo (2019), obtained with a research about the life and work of Theon Spanudis, psychoanalyst and art collector, who participated in social circle of intellectuals in the city.

Flusser's psychology.
The connection between his language philosophy and media theory

Eckhard Geitz

Pivotal in Vilém Flusser's language philosophy and fundamental to his media theory are his reflections on psychology. Rooted in his first unpublished work The 20th Century (1957:95ff.), unfolding in Language and Reality (2017 [1963]) and summarized in The History of the Devil (2015[1965]: 56ff.) Flusser's thoughts on psychology meander from his early writings to his late articles. In the two articles Perception (1990) and The Universe of Technology as Mirror and/or Concealment of the Intention of Man (1987), both published in the journal Praktische Psychologie, Flusser connects the linguistic ontology of perception to the psychological aspect of (digital) information. This connection serves him as a strong argument against Foucault's discourse theory. In a letter from 1988 to Jürgen Link, a German literary scientist and former publisher of the magazine Kulturrevolution, Flusser indicates that Foucault neglected the switch from linear to computational code – a switch Flusser regarded as essential in his opening of Language and Reality: "data are being compiled and compared in order to be computed. We are a generation of accountants who are in the process of becoming a line of computers" (2017:9). Flusser categorizes Western languages as fusional, logically organized and translatable. Through science and philosophy, they have the potential to be transformed into a universal, abstract, artificial language (2017: 37-39). In his presentation Eckhard Geitz reasons psychology can be regarded as the result of the tendencies Flusser describes here. Revisiting Gustav Theodor Fechner's Psychophysik, and Wilhelm Wundt's Laboratory for Experimental Psychology, Geitz tracks down the medial conditions for The Digitization of Psychiatry, his PhD-Project at the Sociological Department of the University of Freiburg. He interprets Flusser's arch between his linguistic and media theory as a concept of psychology that can be used to explore psychiatry as a medium.

Eckhard Geitz is a PhD-candidate at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg's Institute for Sociology. In his research project "Digitization of Psychiatry" he's exploring the digital expansion of the psychiatric landscape. His focus are new types of media through which mental hospitals, psychotherapeutic community practices, outpatient departments, forensic and psychosomatic clinics are now channelled. Eckhard Geitz is a political scientist and documentary filmmaker. Before his academic life he worked as a registered nurse in the forensic department of a psychiatric clinic.

Fiktions des Wissenschaft – Is Science Fiction Translatable?, or is Translation a Science Fiction?

William A. Hanff

The dialectics of continuity and new focusses – Vilém Flusser's way from language philosophy to communication and media theory

Michael Hanke

Vilém Flusser's 1988 short essay Science Fiction explores two strategies of science and fiction as science, and provides clues to his process of translating and retranslating his own work. Flusser explains two different praxes that lead to an essential paradox, and that this two-sided approach is equivalent to Leonardo da Vinci's fantasia essata, an 'exacting fantasy'. For Flusser, Science Fiction is a 'Technik' in the truest sense of the word, and his theory and praxis of science fiction can be applied to his use of translation. While he allows for an 'inexactitude' in science, science fiction and translation – an 'Ungenauigkeit' that allows a space for exploration – he still engaged in translation, using this practice throughout his career.

It is odd then, that he did not take the time to translate and reevaluate his 1988 lecture Science Fiction. Both translation and science fiction can exist as a kind of Technofantasy as proposed by Don Ihde, but one where Flusser's two fiction-in-science strategies to approaching truth ("Wahrheit") in science ("Wissenschaft") are analogous to Hans Vaihinger's two categories of fictions: 'figments' as imaginary fantasy, and 'fictions' as falsifiable conjecture. Both allow for a more nuanced sliding suspension of disbelief that is liminal and active in the human practice of finding meaning in information. This is not a subliminal hidden individual practice, nor is it hyper-liminal collective-unconscious of an overall audience knowledge – but both. This double-edged practice is baked into how narrative and scientific method's dialectic have evolved and replicated across history particularly through translation.

This paper attempts to answer this question in light of both Vaihinger's Philosophy of 'As-If' and Ihde's conceptions of Postphenomenology while looking for approaches to translation and science fictions in Flusser's other works. It will then reconnect to the original 1988 essay linking Flusser's ideas of science fiction and translation to overall intellectual nomadism and the struggle with translating thought, science and fictions.

If it is true that The first cut is the deepest, this may apply also to the development of academics, and indeed we can observe that in many thinkers initial impacts can be traced to later works. In Flusser's case, this applies not only to his first book and its topic, Language and Reality (1963, LR), but also to the references used here to develop his arguments, and that never seized to influence his thinking. These are, at first sight, authors like Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Cassirer, Husserl and Plato, but also Vicente Ferreira da Silva, generally given less attention but paid tribute by Flusser in the foreword of LR (p. 27) as sharing the ideas of the book, although not considered to be their source. However, the Philosophy of Language is explicitly treated in Flusser's homonymous second book from 1965, and in order to follow up the connections between his early writings on language philosophy and his later contributions to media theory and other elements of his thought, it is necessary to start from a critical revision of these initial beginnings. An important element here is dialogue, "the great conversation that we are, as also is reality" ("a grande conversação que somos, e que é toda a realidade" (LR p. 132)), and, furthermore, spoken language and its representations, considered as the keys to resolve the philosophical problem of subject and object, entities later derived from the basis of language use. When in the context of the telematic society the function of technology is to establish intersubjectivity and interpersonal relationships, we see this continuity preserved but transferred to a new focus. The presentation intends to elaborate on these outlines.

William A. Hanff Jr. is Assistant Professor of Digital Media at the Universitz of the District of Columbia. He received his Ph.D. in Media Philosophy from the European Graduate School (EGS) in 2006 on "Documentary Simulations: An Epistemology of Hoax & Paradox". William researches in areas of suspension-of-disbelief, documentary film as well as the pedagogy of teaching digital media in the age of smartphones and transmedia. William is a DC native and filmmaker specializing in both political themes and avant garde film.

Michael Hanke is Associate Professor in Natal, Brazil, holds a Master's degree and postdoc in communication sciences, a Ph.D in semiotics, and two post-doctoral appointments. Publications on Flusser include "Communication", "Communicology", and "Public/Private Space", in Flusseriana – An Intellectual Toolbox and Kommunikation – Medien – Kultur. Vilém Flussers Signaturen der telematischen Gesellschaft (Berlin 2017).

Vampyroteuthis Infernalis: Homo sapien's posthuman future?

Ruth Y. Hsu

Design(ing) Flusser in(to) Hebrew

Uriel Kon & Yanai Toister & Jonathan Ventura

Hsu's presentation focuses on Flusser's mock treatise and report on reputedly one of the most elusive animals in the ocean, the vampire squid. Vampyroteuthus Infernalis is interpreted as a literary text, specifically regarding the narration's polyphony – ironic, satirical, elegiac, awe-struck; the vampire squid in this narrative is cast in the role of a gothic monster that glides, darts, slips into darkened recesses and away from the hunter--marine biologist, naturalist, or the philosopher demanding to know what it knows. In Flusser's ironic telling, the creature possesses many fascinating qualities, and, like Humboldt, we want to capture and study this alien being. Yet, the narrator evinces both desire and aversion towards this creature that is so strange as to be unassimilable in our Imaginary, except as a monster. Flusser's text turns on its head the consumptive and assimilative impulses undergirding all colonial adventures. Vampyroteuthus Infernalis, like the vampire squid, evades conventional taxonomy; arguably, Flusser's text is a landmark in the emerging field of animal studies. Next, Hsu enlists the help of Martin Buber and Donna Haraway in examining Flusser's ontological questions brought forth by the narrator's confrontation with the irredeemable squid/other. The presentation concludes with a (mock) conversation among Buber, Haraway, and a vampire squid.

While the writings of Vilém Flusser are no-longer a well-guarded secret, they are still clandestine in the design discipline. The unrivaled scope, depth, and variation found in his writings should have had a considerable influence on design theory, and yet this influential potential did not manifest. During our work in editing five volumes of design anthologies in Hebrew, we decided to designate the final anthology as a dedicated Flusser volume including 24 essays translated from English and German.

Contrary to other writers, Flusser's philosophy of design steers clear of art-history critique. In his taxonomy, when the word 'design' is used as a noun, it indicates not an artefact but instead the information required for bringing it into being. Used as a verb it indicates a process of forging informative relationships between artefacts, users and contexts. Flusser's philosophy, therefore, takes design as a key to understanding human culture in its broadest possible sense, as an outline not only for 'how we live' but also for how we might or ought to live. Designs (plural noun) he argues, design (verb) us long after the production of their specifications has ceased. He further posits that such activity should itself be characterized as a type of philosophizing. Whilst designing is a making-materially-manifest, what it makes are ideas and how it makes is ineluctably idealistic. Thus, the phrase 'philosophy of design' becomes a subjective genitive – philosophizing that is of, or done as part of, the design process.

Hebrew is a Semitic language with an available vocabulary of only one-third from most Indo-European languages. It consequently manifests a different noun-verb relationship then exists in German or English. To these ends our paper reflects on the process of translating Flusser into Hebrew as, in itself, a form of de-signing; transitioning between symbolic meanings as well as symbolic orders.

Ruth Y. Hsu writes on and teaches narratives to do with race, ethnicity, class, transnationalism, and diaspora. Hired as an Asian American specialist in the English department at the flagship campus of the University of Hawai'i, Hsu has taught numerous classes in Asian American literature and theory, and US ethnic literatures. Recent publications include an essay on the global influence of Netflix and Orange Is The New Black and Sense8; an essay on Yamashita's reimagining of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in her novel, Brazil-Maru. Hsu is co-editor of a Modern Language Association volume in the series, Approaches to Teaching World Literature. This volume is titled, Approaches to Teaching the Works of Karen Tei Yamashita (forthcoming 2020). Hsu has lived in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Los Angeles.

Uriel Kon studied urban planning and architecture. Kon has curated exhibitions, produced Jazz albums and has served as editor-in-chief at Simtaot Books. He was also co-founder and editor at Zikit Books. In 2015 Kon founded 9 Lives Press where he serves as publisher and general editor.

Yanai Toister is an artist, curator and educator serving as Director of the Unit for History and Philosophy at Shenkar College of Engineering, Design and Art in Israel. Toister's forthcoming book Photography from the Turin Shroud to the Turing Machine will be published in early 2020 by Intellect/University of Chicago Press.

Jonathan Ventura is an associate professor of design anthropology specializing in design theories and methodologies. His publications range from design history, social design and healthcare design. Jonathan teaches at the department of inclusive design at Hadassah Academic College in Jerusalem and at the Design Graduate Program at Shenkar College. Jonathan is also a visiting fellow at the HHCD at the RCA London.

Virtual Presence
Maria Lalou

Für eine Philosophy of Caixa Preta:
a text in three languages
Marc Lenot

Our physical embodiment in the network daily presence accumulates to the determination of our freedom. How the power of the algorithm dictates our everydayness is something we all experience. As our personal data has been becoming part of a constant overflow of information controlled by algorithms, what we miss is clarity how is that perpetually happening. In which respect could virtual presence resemble the accumulation of post-truth, while facing the blockage of our freedom of speech?

Deconstructing 'the political' of the viewer by engaging the performative act of viewing under the lens of 'mechanisms of the seen' forms a series of works based on a mediated reality 'layout' between viewers and an operator. Defining the tool of investigation of the various sides of watching and being watched, the work attempts to critically scrutinise the typology of virtual presence's spatial alienation. Continuous sketches approaching societal structures within and without the grid are concluding to the extraordinary power of the apparatus.

With as core subject the power of the learning machine, Virtual Presence is an independent essay as well as the 1st part of the tetralogy Camera and The Mirror. It is introducing the process of extracting the viewer as a physical human entity from the live act and the artist from the role of the operator of the mechanisms of the seen in cultural production. Virtual Presence looks into the various roles of the apparatus and the one of the human, unfolding the reasons for replacing the labour of the latter by a three-module algorithm and focusing on the viewers' data protection.

The essay refers to different ontological stances of presence in the networked discourse along with a collection of thoughts from the perspectives of philosophy, political science, Lacanian theory and filmic language, portraying a sequential mechanism on camouflaging in the grid.

Thoughts and text written by Lalou based on Post-History by Vilém Flusser

Clips presented in Virtual Presence are based on the film The Dialogue (2018), by Lalou.

In his contribution, Marc Lenot considers Flusser's relationship with language in a rather practical manner, more than a purely theoretical one.

Flusser wrote Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie in German in 1983. He then wrote Towards a Philosophy of Photography in 1984. He finally wrote Filosofia da Caixa Preta. Ensaios para uma futura filosofia da fotografia in 1985 in Brazil. These were not mere translations, but, as often with him, rewritings of the former texts. While the English version is quite close to the German one, the Portuguese version not only has a different title (and thus a different stated objective), but its text is quite different, and it benefitted from his concomitant writing of Ins Universum der Technischen Bilder (1985).

Marc Lenot has been working on a critical translation of these texts in a fourth language, French, comparing the three editions and highlighting their differences, whether stylistic or substantial. Such a work raises many interesting questions: why did Flusser rewrite this chapter, why did he omit these paragraphs, why did he include a new development on that specific issue?

It also raises questions on publishing decisions for Flusser's work: shouldn't we use the most recent edition, in this case the 1985 Brazilian one, as more representative of his complete thought? This has not been the case: all translations in other languages were made from the German version. Moreover, the 1984 English text written by Flusser was discarded and never republished, and it is an English translation of the German text, published by Reaktion Books in 2000, which is now the referenced edition in English. The 1985 Brazilian version, the most recent one, was used only for the Brazilian and Portuguese editions, and was never translated in other languages. Aren't these publishing decisions influencing our understanding of Flusser in a somewhat biased way?

Maria Lalou explores the topic of 'viewing' throughout her large-scale installations, films, performances, and publications. Focusing on the topic of viewing, she incorporates cinematic apparatus and surveillance as part of her tools, with central references to 'the political of the viewer'. Lalou is a contemporary conceptual artist born in Athens, Greece and a Fulbright Scholar sharing her time between Amsterdam and Athens.

Marc Lenot is a French independent scholar, with a PhD in Art History from Paris 1 Sorbonne. His research on experimental photography (Jouer contre les Appareils, Photosynthèses, 2017) draws upon Flusser's writings. Since 2005, he also writes a reference blog on art criticism, published by Le Monde.

This is Why I am in Europe: Flusser's letters about the "communicological turn" of the 1973 XII São Paulo Biennale

Isabel Löfgren

Vilém Flusser's notoriety in the intellectual circles of São Paulo by the early 1970s earned him the nomination to curate the Art & Communication nucleus for the XII São Paulo Biennial in 1972. His initial vision for the exhibit as evidenced in the extensive correspondence in his archives, was to emphasise the communicative aspect of this mother of all exhibitions. He understood that the crisis in art and its languages was at the time not a crisis in art per se, but how art is mediated to and with several publics. Far from a mere play of public relations and marketing, Flusser proposed to rethink the basis of the São Paulo Biennial at its core and rethink the basis of the biennale model itself on what he termed a "communicological basis" in response to previous criticism to the event. Under the patronage of Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, Flusser saw this opportunity as a way to put many of his ideas into practice, to address a crisis in the languages of art, the crisis of the biennial model, the role of the artist and his increasing preoccupation to how media and mass communication would come to dominate all aspects of life. Flusser's unusual position as a philosopher and a curator are inspiring to understand his relationship to the visual arts by way of the "communicological turn". Unpublished correspondence found in the Flusser Archive gives insight to the intense negotiations with artists throughout the world and his attempts to persuade the management of the SP Biennial for his ideas. Flusser left the project before it became fully realized, and only parts of his proposals became a reality. It is at this point that Flusser decided, among other reasons, to leave Brazil permanently in 1973 following this episode. Detailed research into the letters and into the XII São Paulo biennale may help unveil the real causes of Flusser's demise from the project and its aftermath. Isabel Löfgren describes Flusser's development of a curatorial language using letters as a meta-medium for developing his vision of "open works" and their reception.

Isabel Löfgren is a Swedish-Brazilian artist, researcher and educator. She works at the crossroads of media and exhibition epistemologies, network cultures, participatory public art projects, and art pedagogical initiatives. Isabel holds a MFA from the School of Fine Arts at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, a PhD in Philosophy, Art and Critical Thought from the European Graduate School, Switzerland, and is a Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University in Sweden.

A Comparative Research Between Flusser's Fiction and Chuang Tzu's Animal Allegory

Zhao Lu

Flusser's book Vampyroteuthis Infernalis has provided a vivid image about his understanding on human and nonhuman; human-centered world and other possible worlds. His phenomenal analysis has revealed ontological-existential structure on Dasein. There are some interesting points in Flusser's writing which is similar to the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu's philosophical description on animals.

There are over 200 places in Chuang Tzu's texts that discusses different kinds of animals ranging from birds, horses, fishes, and insects to butterflies, dragons, etc. These animals represent different relations between human, nature, society, state and others. Both the Vampyroteuthis Infernalis and Chuang Tzu's animal allegory should be understood from the perspective of an existential analysis:

- Ontisch-Seiendes (Heidegger): In a famous paragraph of The Adjustment of Controversies, Zhuang Zhou writes that he dreamed about being a butterfly and when he woke up, he felt confused whether he dreamed about the butterfly or the butterfly dreamed about him. Similar to the Vampyroteuthis Infernalis' abyss-like and dream-like world, it is also provocative and makes us think about variations of Self and the Other.

- Existenzialität (Sein, or in Chuang Tzu's terms Dao): Flusser states, "There's no general world or objective universe" (Flusser, 2011, p. 71). This view is different from Aristotle's categorical understanding of animals as species or genus. Vampyroteuthis Infernalis is not a particular type of animal either: its structure is a reflection on human. This point is similar to Chuang Tzu's view. To mention an example, in his text, Enjoyment in Untroubled Ease, he describes a state of mit-sein among different Daseins. We can call this kind of animal "Kun" and "Peng", while this kind of man is a "spirit-like man", "perfect man" or "sagely-minded man". Besides, the states of mit-sein represent the original way of living with nature, which also means how Dao influences every existence in the world which can be called "flying dragons" (Tzu, 2016, pp. 6–8). Still, there are many differences between Vampyroteuthis Infernalis and Tzu's animals: Flusser describes Vampyroteuthis Infernalis in a phenomenological way. However, Chuang Tzu describes various animals mostly in forms of dialogue with different people such as the emperor or other friends.

References:
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Tzu, C. (2016). The writings of Chuang Tzu. Trans. by James Legge. Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Guji Press.

Zhao Lu is a PhD student at Fudan University, China. Her main research fields are Media Philosophy; History of Communication theory; Visual Culture; History of Photography. Currently she works on her PhD thesis, Into the Universe of Technical Images: A Study on Vilém Flusser's Communication Theory.

Seismic Cyst: Vilém Flusser's Journalistic Philosophical Quasi-Poetry and Oswald de Andrade's Telefonemas in the Corpus of Brazilian Philosophy

Gabriel S. Philipson

In 1976, Bento Prado Jr., professor of philosophy at the University of São Paulo, claimed that the full installation of a philosophical system in Brazil was entirely successful, even though it would have led to a "cauterization of thinking wounds that promised a greater virulence" (PRADO JR., 1980). Nevertheless, this institutionalization process of philosophical thought in Brazil seems nowadays to have not worked out at all: remains of the promised virus are to be found, on the one hand, having a great significance worldwide, such as Oswald de Andrade's Antropofagy, Viveiros de Castro's amerindian perspectivism and Flusser's poetical-journalist-philosophical exiled mode of thinking; but are also to be found, on the other hand, influencing the antidemocratic and authoritarian wave and government in late 2010s Brazil. It is on these grounds the Aufgabe of present philosophical thought from Brazil to retrace the roots of its history, bounds and borders, in order not only to achieve new horizons and perspectives, but also to be able to be entirely modified by excluded thoughts - that, e.g. according to Davi Kopenawa's claim, knows how to survive worlds' ends (since more than 500 years). This paper aims to trace relations between Vilém Flusser and Oswald de Andrade philosophical approaches by examining and comparing Flusser's quasi-poetical way of writing philosophy in newspapers articles of the 1960s with de Andrade's Telefonemas, newspapers articles of the 1940s and 1950s, having as background the relations between de Andrade's A crise da filosofia messiânica (1950) and Flusser's Brasilien oder die Suche nach dem neuen Menschen (1994) (Klengel, 2009). They not only share several criticism and frustrations about the philosophical program that was intended to be established in Brazil, but are also to be seen as exploring the boundaries between thought and literature, announcing and expecting philosophies to come.

Gabriel Philipson holds a degree in Philosophy at the University of São Paulo (USP), and is a doctoral candidate in literary Theory at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp). Presently he is in doing a Binational doctorate at Freie Universität Berlin, with research funded by Fapesp and DAAD.

Vampyroteuthis as a bioluminescent lighthouse to think under the livings. Some mutations: From 1981 to 1991

Elise Rigot

Vampyroteuthis Infernalis is known to be a philosophical fiction (Moles). Flusser describes an abyssal creature, opposites in every points with human. From 1981 to 1991, the book mutates with the writing process of Flusser engaging with letters, oral dialogues and essays. There is a genealogy of the vampy from the French version to the Brazilian Portuguese one. The fantasy becomes little by little the metaphor of the human postmodern condition within the media. Thus, the vampy as an apparatus, could permit us to navigate in the cybernetic world we inhabit (Citton). This gesture might consider this biological animal as a way of thinking in the information age. One opposite movement is also possible, and, as far as we know, not yet explored. It is the following: How can the philosophy of Flusser's programs, embodied in the phenomenology of vampyroteuthis, serves as a lighthouse in the "moment of the living" (Worms) that we are going through nowadays?

By comparing the different versions of the vampy from the French to the Brazilian one, we propose to analyse the vampyroteuthis' inputs to think of the livings. In this regard, the French version, which is the first unpublished version of the typescript given as a gift to his artist friend Louis Bec, deals with an important scientific context. First, we have to note the existence of the French molecular school of biology with Jacob and Monod, and the presence of thinkers such as Bergson and Canguilhem. In the late 1960s, biology was linked with the code by DNA discovery: that's the moment of molecular biology. With phenomenology, Flusser enables us to inhabit deeper living aspects such as randomness and necessity. He explains how these two concepts are linked into programs (Post-History). Without footnoting him, Flusser quotes here the French biologist Monod.

Also, the proposition wants to present another mutation into a media creation, in an episode of a podcast that Rigot creates, called, Bio is the new black. The vampy here becomes a text and a radiophonic creation, read by a comedian that goes through a mobile website.

Elise Rigot is a doctoral student and a teacher at the University Toulouse - Jean Jaurès under the supervision of Anthony Masure and Christophe Vieu. Her thesis in design (LLA-CRÉATIS and LAAS-CNRS) deals with the f(r)ictions between design and nano-bio-technologies. She is the author of the podcast (FR), Bio is the new black, dealing with design and bio-manufacturing technologies.

Questioning Causation. A fictional dialogue between Vilém Flusser and John Dewey

Alexander Schindler

Manifesto Anthrobscene

Karen Tei Yamashita

Already in his first published book, Lingua e Realidade (1963), Flusser dealt with fundamental philosophical problems and, parallel to the emergence of poststructuralism in France, opened up his own theses on the relationship between language and reality. The book has been widely criticized in the reviews and in some cases even torn to pieces (Hanke 2006). Nevertheless, Flusser remained consistent with most of his theses and continued to develop them. One of them was his postulate that we have to discard our understanding of reality, as it prescribes a deterministic logic, similar to the arrowy construction of inflectional languages. This form of representation seems to have shaped the origins and development of western culture from the very beginning: A codified system which, according to Flusser, is not capable to represent reality anymore. The crisis of linearity resembles a crisis of the principle of causation and bears witness to inadequacy for knowledge production and scientific inquiry. Flusser's criticism of the causation of obsolete codes runs like a red thread through his work up to his genealogy of technical media and his phenomenology of gestures.

While Flusser focuses on language, the pragmatist and educational reformer John Dewey (1859-1952) considers the essentials of human experience as a critique of causation. For Dewey, the origins of causal thinking can be traced back to the social conditions of ancient Greece. Only under the unequally social conditions at that time, which for Dewey had nothing to do with the actual human experience as a social being in nature, could the causal thinking prevail as a general mode of understanding the world and further continue to dominate the principles of modern scientific inquiry.

Within the talk the two thinkers, Flusser and Dewey, should enter into a fictional "dialogue". This is less about the unifying synthesis that causation cannot represent reality at all, but rather about the various reasons that led to this syntheses and its epistemic consequences.

In 1940 on the onset of WWII, Vilém Flusser, his Czech family lost to German concentration camps, left Europe for São Paulo to become a Brazilian citizen, where he wrote and taught philosophy until 1972. Flusser wrote, in 1987, Vampyroteuthus Infernalis, which one reviewer of the English translation compared to the writings of Jorge Luis Borges. In the spirit of Borges and Flusser, and set in Brazil, Yamashita's presentation depicts the legacy of colonial processes that continue to destroy native populations, human and non-human, and to conceive of earth as inanimate, blind, mute, and utterly insensible. Divided into two parts, part one re-imagines Oswald Andrade's "Manifesto Antropofágico" and Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," countering the empiric construction of native people as "savages" and innate cannibals. Part two re-composes a story told by a parrot, whose ancestor had been separated from her mate by Alexander von Humboldt. In 1799, Humboldt is said to have sent a parrot home to Prussia, the parrot being the last keeper of the language of an extinct Amazonian tribe. The descendant parrot and her interlocutor reconstruct a fabula composed in the register of dark humor about the deepest recesses of a forest (or the human id). In this primordial forest—reminiscent of a staging of Pina Bausch's "Rites of Spring"—a fecund exchange occurs between sightless Mother Tongue and a ravenous Father Penis who "ate the eyes of everything."

Alexander W. Schindler studied Media and Communication at Berlin University of the Arts and is currently finishing a second Master's degree in Philosophy of Science. His research focuses on Epistemologies of Media in times of anthropogenic climate change. He worked for the Vilém Flusser Archive, is part of the Critical Zones Research Group with Bruno Latour, and is co-organizing a conference with Birgit Schneider on climate change communication.

Karen Tei Yamashita was born in Oakland, California. She is a novelist, playwright, essayist, and scholar. Her eighth book is forthcoming in 2020. Yamashita's oeuvre has been described as avant garde and postmodernist, and has received numerous awards. She lived in Brazil for almost ten years and returns periodically; her husband is an architect and artist. Yamashita's trio of "Brazilian" novels – Through the Arc of the Rain Forest, Brazil Maru, and Circle K Cycles -- is credited with definitively ushering in the "transnational turn" in Asian American literature. She counts among her literary influences: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jorge Luis Borges, and Italo Calvino.

Vilém Flusser and His "Languages"

Keynote Presentations

Reversing the vectors of meaning.
The diagrammatic language of Vilém Flusser

Daniel Irrgang

Art and Language in Vilém Flusser's Brazil

Martha Schwendener

According to his own cultural analysis, Flusser was a man of yesterday. He, who passionately wrote nearly every day of his life, was himself subject to the "textolatry" of modernity. A modernity, though, which would soon shift into a yet uncertain new epoch, a situation which Flusser and others had given similar names, such as post-histoire, post-modernity, information or telematic society. In this new situation, according to Flusser, written text would become a marginal code, soon to be superseded by the "technical image" as universal means of communication and information storage. In fact, in the light of such a fundamental shift, Flusser described authors like himself, which would stay engaged with text rather than to operate with technical images, as "the new illiterates" of the upcoming age. But although Flusser was in fact a man of the written word, I will argue that there was at least one type of sign system with which he also operated frequently and which, in a certain way, may be linked to his image heuristics: the diagram. Scattered over his manuscripts, letters and notes, over 160 diagrammatic sketches drawn by Flusser can be found in the Vilém Flusser Archive. Compared to the thousands of documents in the archive, this seems to be a small number. But his diagrammatic sketches are not only interesting considering the nearly exclusively textual character of Flusser's intellectual legacy; they could also be described as Flusserian technical images. According to the classic semiotic definition of the diagram by Charles S. Peirce, diagrammatic signs constitute a specific subclass of the icon: A diagram resembles its object not by visual but structural similarity. By drawing a diagram, one aesthetically proposes a hypothesis about the structure of its object, thus manifesting an abstract concept as a concrete sign. Here we come close to Flusser's notion of technical images as projections of abstract models and, moreover, concretizations of the virtual possibilities of those models. Thus, the lecture will plea for a non-trivial relation between Flusser's heuristic of the technical image and his diagrammatic practice.

Paradoxically, Flusser felt exiled to the "periphery" of culture by his forced migration to Brazil in 1940, but he was actually arriving at a center of innovation. The Museu de Arte Moderna opened in São Paulo in 1948, the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro in 1949, and the inaugural São Paulo Biennial in 1951. Concrete art intersected with Concrete poetry and Flusser was profoundly impacted by these developments, which I will discuss in this paper.

Flusser was impressed by the formal layout of Concrete art and poetry and their approaches to space, color, and typography. Concrete poetry affected "the Gestalt … or the visual character of writing," he wrote, and "Concretist experiments are rupturing discursive thought and endowing it with a second dimension of 'ideas' which discursive thought cannot supply" (Groundless, 191). Concrete painting and poetry served as proto- interfaces or screens – just as Mira Schendel's paintings functioned for Flusser as as "pre-texts," providing new ways to think about language and materialism. The new Brazilian poetry "deprogrammed language" in visual form, Flusser argued, but it also offered what poet and theorist Haroldo de Campos called a "new dialogical relationship" with "imperial" languages, which Flusser would discuss in an early, undated essay titled "On a Few Linguistic Aspects of Brazilian Civilization."

These developments caught the attention of Max Bense, the information-aesthetics theorist who served as an early and important model for Flusser. Bense did not favor or distinguish between art, language, and technologically-generated objects: he exhibited Concrete poetry, as well as early computer-generated drawings and the work of Flusser's friend Mira Schendel, at the Study Gallery of the University of Stuttgart from the late fifties to the late seventies. Flusser translated a fragment of Haroldo de Campos' Galaxies for Bense's and Elisabeth Walther's experimental journal rot, and the language of Bense's information aesthetics would linger in Flusser's writing on technical and synthetic images. The enduring impact of Concrete art and poetry can also be glimpsed in Flusser's concept of "superficial" reading, non-linear "post-historical" thinking, and, ultimately, the idea that philosophy itself would be practiced in images rather than written words.

Daniel Irrgang is a research fellow at Weizenbaum Institute, Berlin. He holds a PhD in media studies on diagrammatics and expanded mind with a case study on Vilém Flusser's diagrammatic practice. Daniel is also coordinator of the research seminar "Critical Zones" by Bruno Latour at Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design.

Martha Schwendener, Ph.D., is a Visiting Associate Professor at New York University, Steinhardt School of Art, and an art critic for The New York Times. She edited a book of Vilém Flusser's essays for Artforum magazine, Flusser/Essays (São Paulo: Metaflux, 2017), and is working on a manuscript on Flusser's philosophy and its relationship to art.

Vilém Flusser and His "Languages" | Virtual Exhibition

The Anti-Archive as a spatial design tool for the continuous destruction and reconstruction of memory

Cristina Achury

The Anti-Archive examines the concept of the word as storage of memory - the word as an archive. It fragments memory spaces to articulate potential, avoid discursive language, and create new levels of meaning. The concept of the Anti-Archive is a creative tool that should enable the continuous destruction of memory as well as its reconstruction.

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Cristina Achury is a visual communication designer specializing in exhibition and editorial design. She holds a master's degree in "Exhibition design" (UdK Berlin), where she focused on linguistic spaces and memory. She gained relevant work experience in the creative industries and taught as an adjunct professor in Colombia.

L'Inter-code, 2017

Pablo-Martín Córdoba

Strengthened by the soundtrack, the animation stages the opposition of Images and Texts according to Vilém Flusser's ideas. For this philosopher, technical images (photography, video) claim to show the real world while they merely codify the scientific texts to which they owe their origin: Texts and Images confront each other in the representation of reality. This dialectical relationship, whose synthesis remains to be found, is doubled in the video of another opposition: the equilibrium of primitive man facing the divergences of technical progress.
L'inter-code questions the possibilities and limits of science and its materialization in technology.

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Pablo-Martín Córdoba is a contemporary artist living and working in Paris. His work is situated between immobility and movement, transposed from the real world into digital images that become a plastic material. Through videos, photographic montages and installations, the artist questions specific aspects of the world without excluding shifts towards fiction.

Al Zahir

Alice Dalgalarrondo

The Zahir in Jorge Luis Borges' story is an object by which men become obsessed and are no more able to see anything beyond it. The mystery: why does the Zahir has this attractor power? Borges questions himself the reason why Tennyson said that if we could understand one single flower, we could understand what the world is. "Perhaps he was trying to say that there is nothing, however humble, that does not imply the history of the world and its infinite concatenation of causes and effects." And then the Zahir would also have this potency of revealing the nature of being and existence. I conciliate Deleuze's object's ontology and Flusser's concept of virtuality with aspects of the Sufi philosophy in order to investigate how does a single object manifests itself, what are its potencies of existence beyond the real and the relations this object maintains with other systems to comprehend the whole through it.

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Alice Dalgalarrondo is a multimedia artist from Brazil living in Berlin. She holds a bachelor of Media Studies from the State University of Campinas and a postgraduate degree in Art and Media from the University of Arts, Berlin. Her last works were exhibited at Kasseler Dokfest, Transmediale, Museum für Fotografie and Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen.

Camera and The Mirror

Maria Lalou

How do we experience cinema in our surveilled networked reality? Camera and The Mirror is an experimental documentary, a tetralogy of video essays that involves the relation of the camera's role in the animated experience of the viewer, by analysing the function of the medium in our contemporary surveilled networked life towards the history of film production. With the first chapter 'Virtual Presence' using clips from her film 'The Dialogue' Lalou moves the narrative through the works of three major makers of film history, Farocki, Makhmalbaf and Godard. By marking an index of cameras demonstrating the ideas behind their medium produced, and by scrutinising the ingenious of each film, she directs a manual towards freedom from algorithmic governance; where the relation between camera, view and actor, subject and object is foregrounded and destabilised.

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Maria Lalou explores the topic of 'viewing' throughout her large-scale installations, films, performances, and publications. She incorporates cinematic apparatus and surveillance as part of her tools, with central references to 'the political of the viewer'. Lalou is a contemporary conceptual artist, filmmaker and scholar born in Athens, Greece exhibiting and lecturing internationally while sharing her studio time between Amsterdam and Athens.

Temporal clusters
Elisa Storelli

Temporal clusters are mind maps of Storelli's artistic practice and are used as a tool in her artistic research, 'chronomorphology': the study of how time develops and changes shape. One cluster is a diagram of notions. Concepts are positioned and connected in relation to one another to create a resonance of meanings. This form of diagrammatic writing is used by the artist to navigate through her thinking and to describe a possible correlation of ideas. Sometimes these associations have developed into artworks; sometimes they could become one.

Elisa Storelli (1986) describes her artistic research as Chronomorphology, an exploration about the ever-changing shape of time. Since 2013 she has studied both the properties and the possibilities surrounding the representation of time - "the eternal, the instant, the duration, the process, the repetition, the unicity, the flow, the freezing"

Muju
Hana Yoo

Staying is accompanied by non-staying. Not staying anywhere - Muju(무주, 無住) in Zen-Buddhism directs to leave all forms of obsession, and at the same time to change without sticking to oneself. With the narration reflecting the interpretation of Zen-Buddhism philosophy and anarchism on the theme of the center and periphery, the video induces meditative appreciation and eventually leads to an artificial nature. While presenting different technical images of the desert, the question remains in between temporality and the continuity of the wandering mind.
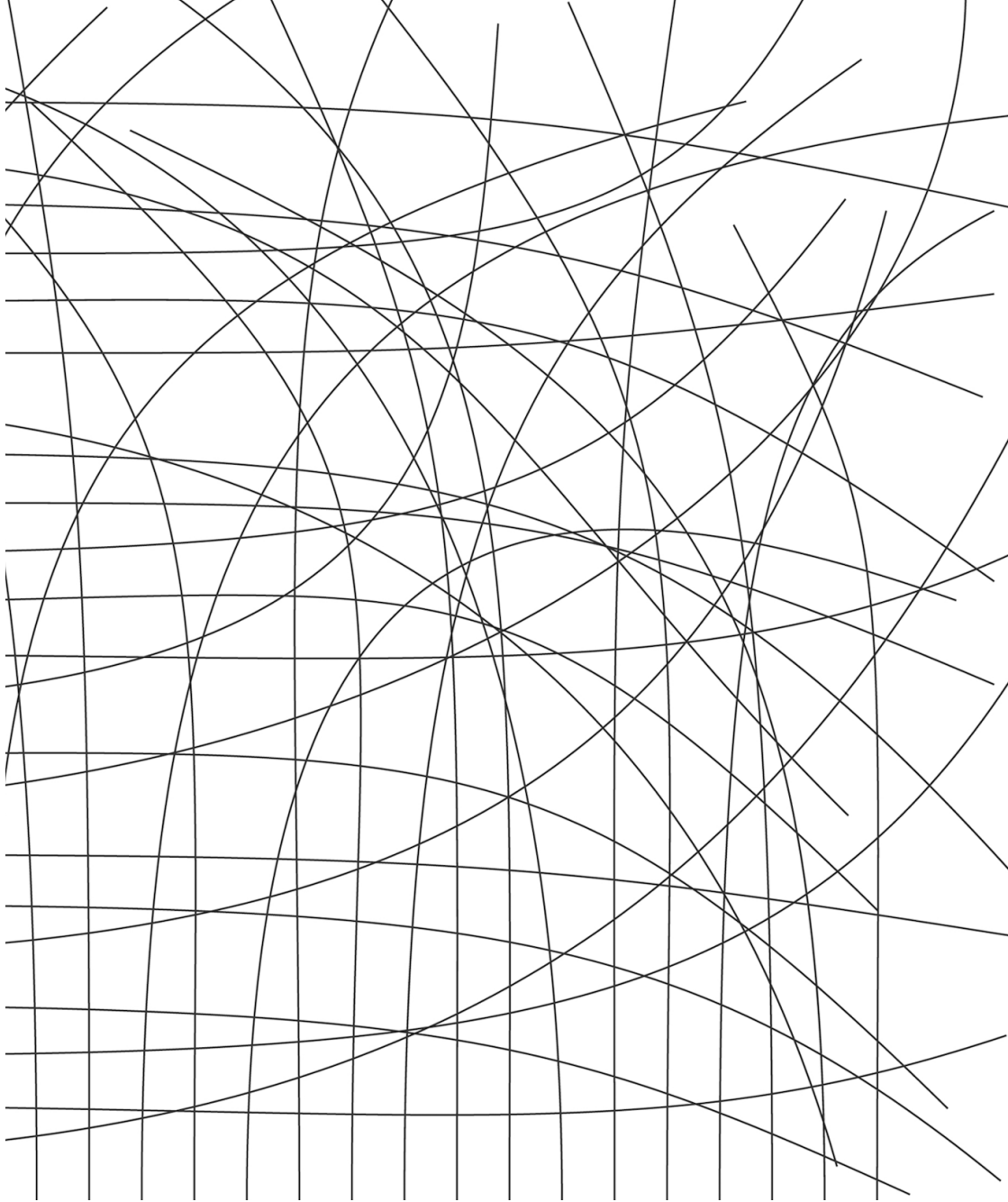
Hana Yoo investigates in her experiential video and film, the nature of artificiality and its politics, altered mental states derived from technical apparatus. Focusing on the immateriality of moving images, she explores relations with various media such as poetry and digital game through storytelling.

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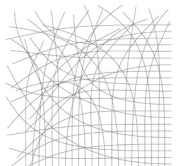
Vilém Flusser Archiv

Vilém Flusser Archive

Berlin University of the Arts
Vilém Flusser Archive (Room 208)
Grunewaldstr. 2-5
10823 Berlin
GERMANY