

## Introduction

Archiving the work of an artist or thinker is an activity that strongly defines and structures our view of her/him. Archives allot a specific place for each selected item and at the same time construct possible paths between them. This implies highlighting some areas while hiding others. In this sense, an archive is always also a metaphor for the work of an author. Traditional archives operate with hierarchical structures like the alphabet, which automatically defines a beginning and an end. Information technology, however, has opened a completely new array of possibilities. This issue of FS reflects upon these theoretical and epistemological implications by presenting the different ways that Vilém Flusser's work has been archived over the last 25 years.<sup>1</sup>

In this digital era when everyone is a potential archivist and curator of data collections, the archive became a buzzword in the cultural sphere. Traditionally the archive is understood as an accumulation of "historical" records that have been selected for preservation, but seen from another perspective, the archive also fabricates "history". Archives have a crucial impact on cultural memory and in the reception of the work of an artist or thinker (or both), in many ways they shape the work and its vibrancy. This implication is even more relevant to archives that go beyond preservation and storage by engaging in the dissemination of the work, e.g. with the practical support of posthumous publishing of printed matter as well as of digital material online, or by supporting and hosting events that invigorate the discussion on the work. Archives fix the conditions of access to the work in several infrastructural aspects, such as the extent of the collection, the access economy, the indexing and classification systems, or the curatorial presentation of the heterogeneous material. Therefore, structurally different archives are likely to shape different forms of access. Now that there is a whole range of different archival projects dedicated to the work and life of Vilém Flusser, it is our goal to present these different approaches in order to open up interconnected ways of access among them, and to create a platform for further discussion and interaction.

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<sup>1</sup> For further archives of Vilém Flusser's work, see Wikipedia: Vilém Flusser, Monoskop: Vilém Flusser and the Flusser archive in São Paulo.

Whether it is the archive's keyword index<sup>2</sup> or the commented Flusser bibliography<sup>3</sup>, the two hypertexts on a Flusser lecture<sup>4</sup> or on Flusser's life and work<sup>5</sup>, the different lists to online Flusser material<sup>6</sup>, the digitization<sup>7</sup> and online publishing of archival material<sup>8</sup> or the performing of the archive<sup>9</sup>, what makes these Flusserian archival projects so special, is that they are personal projects. Small groups of people have pursued new ways of communicating, of co-designing meaning that reflects and realizes their personal vision of access to Flusser's thinking which inspired themselves. These Flusserian archival projects follow central aspects of Flusser's work in being open to an "honest, unsystematic"<sup>10</sup> approach to potential overlaps and gaps with a strong focus on interrelations. The elaborate structures and the collaborative design processes of these Flusserian archival projects therefore not only create an orienting structure for all Flusserphiles, but they shape the survival of Flusser's thinking in the memory of others.

The first part of the issue, "Archiving Flusser", opens with Vilém Flusser's own reflections on memory and the different possibilities of archiving information, electronic and otherwise. In early 1988, Flusser began writing an essay on memory for the symposium "The Art of Scene" which took place at the *Ars electronica* in the Brucknerhaus in Linz from September 13 to September 18. The other speakers, besides Flusser, were Friedrich Kittler, Jean Baudrillard, Hannes Böhringer, Heinz von Foerster and Peter Weibel. Flusser presented his speech on September 14 (*Ars Electronica* 1988). Altogether, he produced eight typescript-versions: four different German versions – "Gedächtnisstützen I" (ten pages), "Gedächtnisstützen II" (eight pages), "Gedächtnisse" (seven pages) and a short summary "Das Gedächtnis. Zusammenfassung meines Referates" (one page and a half) –, two Portuguese versions – "Mémoria I" (six pages) and "Mémoria II" (six pages) –, one in

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<sup>2</sup> See the contribution "MaHiPo – Vom Worte-Schlagen durch den Texte-Dschungel" by Vera Schwamborn.

<sup>3</sup> See the contribution "Flusser-Quellen" by Klaus Sander.

<sup>4</sup> The "Flusser-Hypertext" is based Flusser's 1989 lecture on "Schreiben für Publizieren" [Writing for publishing]. See the contribution "Flusser hören – lesen – studieren" by Bernd Wingert.

<sup>5</sup> The 1998 hypertext by Reinhold Grether "Weltrevolution nach Flusser" [World revolution following Flusser] was realized in the framework of "Flusser Files" by Claudia Klinger. See the contribution "Die Flusser Files" by Claudia Klinger.

<sup>6</sup> There are different contextualized link lists online at [Flusser Files](#) (see "Die Flusser Files" by Claudia Klinger), at [MagmaMater](#) (see "The flusserian Net of Chile" by Gerardo Santana Trujillo) and [FlusserBrasil](#) (see "FlusserBrasil" by Gustavo Bernardo) as well as *Wikipedia*: Vilém Flusser and *Monoskop*: Vilém Flusser.

<sup>7</sup> See the contribution "(Re-)Archiving Flusser" by Anita Jóri and Alexander Schindler.

<sup>8</sup> Most extensively so far at [FlusserBrasil](#) (see "FlusserBrasil" by Gustavo Bernardo).

<sup>9</sup> See the contribution "Performing the Archive and Vilém Flusser" by Simone Osthoff.

<sup>10</sup> The quotation "Aber ehrlich sagt ja schon unsystematisch" comes from a video recording of a conversation held in 1988 with Vilém and Edith Flusser, Andreas Müller-Pohle and Volker Rapsch, VFA video source VHS\_MP\_002.

English – “On memory (electronic and otherwise)” (seven pages) – and one in French: “La mémoire” (five pages). Flusser translated the two Portuguese versions – “Mémoria I” and “Mémoria II” – for his Brazilian friend Milton Vargas. Since the longer versions are generally the earlier ones, one can assume that he most probably wrote “Gedächtnisstützen I” and “Gedächtnisstützen II” first. The essay “Gedächtnisse” (the actual text of the speech) and the short summary “Das Gedächtnis”, as well as the English, Portuguese and French versions followed.

“Gedächtnisse“ was published in 1989 in *Philosophien der neuen Technologie*, ed. by Ars Electronica, Berlin, Merve Verlag (pages 41–55) and again in *Wissenschaftszentrum Nordrhein-Westfalen. Jahrbuch 1994* (ed. by G. Kaiser, Düsseldorf 1995, pages 72-79). Flusser translated this text into English. It was published in *Leonardo. Journal of the International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology* (Berkeley, vol. 23, nr. 4, Autumn 1990, pages 397–399) and again in *Ars Electronica: Facing the Future* (ed. by T. Druckrey, Cambridge/Mass.; London 1999). Flusser also did a French translation “La mémoire”, which was published in *Théâtre/Public* (Gennevilliers, Paris) nr. 85, January/February 1989) and *Art Cognition. Pratiques artistiques et sciences cognitives* along with the English version (ed. by Cypres/Ecole d’Art d’Aix-en-Provence, January 1994, pages 23–34). “Das Gedächtnis. Zusammenfassung meines Referates für Ars Electronica, Linz, 13–18/9/88” was published in *Ars Electronica. Festival für Kunst, Technologie und Gesellschaft. Brucknerhaus Linz, 13. bis 17. September 1988* (ed. by Linzer Veranstaltungsgesellschaft mbH (LIVA), Linz, 1988, pages 86–87, and at Ars Electronica Archiv: “Das Gedächtnis”.

In “On memory (electronic and otherwise)” Flusser discusses different forms of memory and the wider changes electronic storage will have on culture. “Electronic memories are about to radically transform our cultural memory, and the term ‘human dignity’ will thus acquire new meaning. The purpose of this contribution is to consider some of the aspects of that transformation” (page 1). Human beings contradict both the entropy of nature and culture by genetic and cultural memory. “The most impressive example for such negatively entropic epicycles is constituted by the biomass which has recently emerged on the surface of our planet.” Memories “float like islands within the general stream toward entropy, islands which preserve some information for some time, before they dissolve within the tendency toward entropy from which they have emerged by accident. [...] They constitute negatively entropic epicycles which sit upon the linear entropic tendency of nature” (ibid.). However, the biomass is not a trustworthy memory because of errors of transmission. Cultural memory is much shorter and “even less trustworthy” (page 2). Documents turn into ashes and

buildings crumble. There are two main cultural memory supports: spoken language and hard objects. Oral culture leads “to numerous errors of transmission” (ibid.). Hard objects can wear out, especially if they are used as tools. Another powerful way of storing information is the alphabet and the written culture it gave rise to, for instance, the trans-human memory of Platonic philosophy and the biblical texts.

With electronic memories that simulate “the memory functions of the brain within inanimate objects” (page 4) we reach a new stage that permits us to observe the “process of storage of acquired information from the outside” (ibid.). They provide us “with a critical distance” and will allow us in the long run “to emancipate ourselves” (page 5) from what we associate with our previous cultural identity intimately tied to processes of memorization and recollection. Electronic memories are “informed more easily” (ibid.) than human brains, they last much longer and are more easily manipulated and transmitted. “By this, our brain will be freed for other tasks, like the one to process the informations [sic]. This processing of information is called ‘creativity’: we may expect a veritable explosion of human creativity, once we have freed ourselves from all the mechanizable [sic] aspects of thinking” (ibid.). Furthermore, electronic memories can be linked to robots. This will free us from working and turn us into programmers, into players with information. Electronic memories also forget much better than human beings do. “Our brains are burdened with this sort of no longer valid informations [sic], and this inhibits us from processing valid informations [sic]. Electronic memories permit a progressive critical elimination of information waste, and thus a disciplined progressive information accumulation” (ibid.). As in many other texts from this period, Flusser’s analysis focuses only upon the technological dimension and its consequences on culture and human life, but completely ignores the dimension of political power as well as the social consequences of technological innovation, which are, to say the least, highly ambivalent.

The truly revolutionary aspect of this coming revolution, however, is the critical distance that these electronic memories make possible, in regard to “our capacities to acquire, to store and to transmit informations [sic]” (ibid.). Memory is “not a thing, but a process” (ibid.). This move from hard to soft, from the relationship of subject and object to inter-subjectivity is also expressed in the change of the original German title from *Gedächtnisstützen* (memory support) to *Gedächtnisse*. Information flows through us. We are interconnected knots in a “universal network of information flux” (page 6). Let us take this final statement as a starting point for the main question of his issue: In which ways do the different forms of electronic storage of Vilém Flusser’s work allow for a new,

distanced view of his thinking?

Starting from 1989, Bernd Wingert collaborated on the “Flusser Hypertext” that is based on a Flusser lecture on “Schreiben für Publizieren” [Writing for publishing]. In his contribution, “Flusser hören – lesen- studieren. Der Flusser-Hypertext – von der Nachgeschichte zur Vorgeschichte”, he recapitulates the different phases of development and reflects upon the structure and functionality of the hypertext project. This “Flusser Hypertext” inspired following Flusserian archival projects, such as the keyword index of the Vilém Flusser Archive, or the online “Flusser-Files”.

In the second contribution, “MaHiPo – Vom Worte-Schlagen<sup>11</sup> durch den Texte-Dschungel” [MaHiPo – Cutting one’s way through the text-jungle], Vera Schwamborn describes her work in the Flusser-Archive in The Hague. In the summer of 1992, she was instrumental in setting up and organizing the archive. Flusser’s son Miguel travelled every two months to the Netherlands to assist the electronical implementation of the project. Schwamborn developed a comprehensive list of 172 keywords (see Keyword-Manual February 1993) that is still of great interest for a broader understanding of Vilém Flusser’s thinking because it avoids the later reductionism of the digital thinker. “Materialien” is a series of eight texts—“Manual-Keyword”, “Keywords auf Portugiesisch von Edith Flusser”, “supposé Newsletter 1-1993”, “Notes from Micha”, “Posto Zero”, “Schach (Post Zero) von Edith Flusser”, “Skizzen zu den technischen Bildern von Vilém Flusser”, “Inhaltsverzeichnis ‘Vom Subjekt zum Projekt’”—which are related to the project. There are also eight photographs by her done in the Archive in The Hague, showing Edith and Miguel as well as a wasp’s nest that Schwamborn uses in her text as a metaphor of the archive.

Klaus Sander, who followed Vera Schwamborn in the installation of the Vilém Flusser Archive as early as 1992, provides in his contribution, “Flusser-Quellen: Eine kommentierte Bibliographie Vilém Flussers von 1960 bis 2002”, a personal insight in his detailed project of a commented Flusser bibliography and the growing of an archive. The “Flusser-Quellen” [Flusser sources] are definitely an archival gem and offer a crucial navigational support and contextualized orientation within the extensive published work of Vilém Flusser. The “Flusser-Quellen” was created by Klaus Sander in collaboration with the Vilém Flusser Archive and Andreas Müller-Pohle’s European Photography. The original plan was to publish this material as volume one of Müller-Pohle’s “Edition Flusser” together with a CD-ROM version in 1996/1997.

In his foreword to the final online publication of Sander’s “Flusser-Quellen” by the Vilém

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<sup>11</sup> *Schlagwort* means also keyword.

Flusser Archive, Daniel Irrgang retraces the origin of this comprehensive and interrelationally commented list of all of Vilém Flusser's texts published between 1960 and 2002 including essays, book chapters, books and CDs in seven different languages. It also contains a list of all interviews and videos directly related to his person and his work.

Claudia Klinger's "Flusser-Files" was the very first internet site in Germany dealing with Vilém Flusser's work. It went online as early as 1998. Among link lists on Flusser books, video and audio material as well as secondary sources, it contains the hypertext by Reinhold Grether "Weltrevolution nach Flusser" and a comment on a Flusser Symposium held in March 1999 in Puchheim (Germany) written in German and Italian by Bernd Wingert and Rainer Guldin.

In their contribution "(Re-)Archiving Flusser", Anita Jóri and Alexander Schindler, the current staff of the Vilém Flusser Archive (with the new director Prof. Dr. Maren Hartmann since spring 2016), reflect the history of becoming an archive and on three different Flusser Archive collections. They also report on the digitization of the archival material and comment on the current archival project with the Historical Archive of the City of Cologne.

"Magma Mater", originally "Flusser estudios"<sup>12</sup>, was born in 2010 thanks to the collaboration of Gerardo Santana Trujillo and Breno Onetto as a resource for the students of the Universidad Austral de Chile in Valdivia. It contains among other texts by Vilém Flusser a series of Spanish translations, a bibliography of his work five videos as well as the transcripts of the Bochumer Vorlesungen of 1991. In his trilingual contribution "La red flusseriana de Chile", "The Flusserian Net of Chile", and "Das flusserianische Netz Chiles", Trujillo gives an insight into the ambitions for, the extent of, and the response to this special Chilean access to Flusser's work.

"FlusserBrasil" (<http://www.flusserbrasil.com/>) is a virtual space for the preservation and dissemination Vilém Flusser's work. Its major goal is to make his texts available and to promote the publication of his work in Brazil and worldwide.

In "Performing the Archive and Vilém Flusser", Simone Osthoff reviews three phases of her research on the theme of the archive and in relation to Vilém Flusser. She first examined the work of artists, mostly Brazilian, who destabilized the archive by creating fluid boundaries between their artworks and the archives they created in order to historicize the movements they participated in. The second phase is made up of two collaborations at Penn State University in the context of the digital humanities. These creative projects—a video and a sound performance—were developed with

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<sup>12</sup> "Flusser estudios" has been archived at <http://web.archive.org/web/20151011061253/http://flusserestudios.cl/>.

designers, scientists, and musicians between 2012 and 2013. The third phase, still unfolding, focuses on the fluid boundaries between the subject and the object of research, especially in decolonial practices, histories, and methodologies. In every instance, insights into the archive stemmed primarily from the dialogue with artists, but also from the exploration of a few curators and theorists, including Flusser.

The second part “On photography” contains three versions of a text by Marc Lenot dealing with Flusser’s relation to photographers and the way photographers have reacted to his work originally written in French, “Flusser et les photographes, les photographes et Flusser” [Flusser and Photographers, Photographers and Flusser]. Lenot points out that the concept of experimental photography has rarely been defined, nor has it been the subject of much research in studies of contemporary photography. Vilém Flusser is one of the few writers who, in his book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, proposed a definition of experimental photography as “playing against the apparatus”, i.e. the practice of some photographers who do not abide by the rules of photography and perturb the standard operations of the apparatus by playing against the camera. Aside from this conceptual definition, Flusser himself gave few examples of this practice, principally those of Andreas Müller-Pohle and Joan Fontcuberta. While expanding this definition, the essay sheds light on contemporary photographers whose work can be qualified as experimental in this respect—some deconstruct the camera by reinventing it or photographing without a lens (pinhole), or even without a camera (photograms). A few undo the image creation process, playing with time, with light, with the chemical development process or with image printing. And others redefine the author-photographer, erasing her/himself or giving her/himself a different role in the photographic process. The author observes that contemporary experimental photography is not a school or a movement, but simply a current, a moment between the decline of traditional documentary analog photography and the rise of digital photography.

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