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A Cartogram of Vilém Flusser's Nomadism

This cartogram is an artifact of the exhibition “Bodenlos – Vilém Flusser and the Arts” first at the Centre for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe in 2015 and then at the Academy of the Arts in Berlin (2015.2016). Curated by Siegfried Zielinski and Baruch Gottlieb, the exhibition project along with its accompanying publications was intensively supported by the Vilém Flusser Archive at the Berlin University of the Arts, for which I was at the time responsible as research supervisor, supported by my colleague Monaí de Paula Antunes. The cartogram, whose title can be translated as “The nomadic ways and the network of supporters of Vilém Flusser”, was part of the exhibition in the form of a large-scale print out and a small poster that was made available to the visitors.

Besides these forms of dissemination, the cartogram has never been published before. Although I am an admirer of the fleeting nature and ephemerality of exhibitions, I always regretted that this work – graphically conceived and executed by implementing two axes, one temporal, one spatial, by the designer and researcher Clemens Jahn – was not distributed more widely. I am glad that this special issue of *Flusser Studies* offers an opportunity for publication providing a much wider audience. Not only because of its character as a beacon for international studies of the work and legacy of Flusser, but also because the special issue's title, “Changing Perspectives”, provides, in my view, a theme that aptly frames the cartogram's visual inquiry.

The work of Vilém Flusser is closely tied to his biography, which provided experiences of both immeasurable pain (the killing of Flusser's close family in the Holocaust and the experience of uprootedness of the refugee) and thriving hope (the encounters with many friends and supporters). There are many biographical works on Vilém Flusser available, reaching from his own autobiographical accounts written in the 1970s to excellently detailed biographical scholarship conducted many years later.¹ However, I always found the overview this cartogram provides on the

¹ Among others: Vilém Flusser, “In Search of Meaning,” in: *Writings*, Andreas Ströhl (ed.), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, London, 2002; Vilém Flusser, *Bodenlos: Eine philosophische Autobiographie*, Bollmann, Bensheim, Düsseldorf, 1992; Silvia Wagnermaier, “Biografie I – Bodenlos. 1920–1940,” in: S. Wagnermaier and Nils Röller (eds.), *absolute Vilém Flusser*, Orange Press, Freiburg, 2009, pp. 24–31; Nils Röller, “Biografie II – Ideenfresser. 1940–1972,” in: Wagnermaier and Röller 2009, pp. 52–63; Daniel Irrgang and Marcel René Marburger, “Vilém Flusser. A biography” / “Vilém Flusser. Eine Biographie” / “Vilém Flusser. Uma biografia,” in: *Flusseriana: An Intellectual Toolbox* [tri-lingual: English, German, Portuguese], Siegfried Zielinski, Peter Weibel and Daniel Irrgang (eds.): Univocal Publishing, Minneapolis, 2015, pp. 452–519; Anke Finger, Rainer Guldin and Gustavo Bernardo, *Vilém Flusser: An Introduction*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2011. However, the most detailed and encompassing biography so far is by Rainer Guldin and Gustavo Bernardo, *Vilém Flusser (1920–1991). Ein Leben in der Bodenlosigkeit. Biographie*, Bielefeld, Transcript, 2017; Gustavo Bernardo, *O Homem sem Chão: A Biografia de Vilém Flusser*, Annablume, São Paulo, 2017.

complexities and ruptures of time and space, very helpful when it comes to grasp the scope of the *Bodenlosigkeit* experienced by Flusser. This existential experience has a model character for many uprooted people in the violent disruptions that have shaped the 20th century. Disruptions that turned out, despite the many hopes for a global coexistence around the turn of the millennium, to be still shaping the current millennium.

The “temptation of the diagram,”² in this case a synoptical cartogram, is to provide an enchanting overview, a “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere,”³ suggesting a somewhat complete topology of knowledge. Of course, no such topology or depiction can ever be complete. For example, Andreas Müller-Pohle, Flusser’s long-time publisher and supporter, has pointed out to me that the cartogram misses some important milestones in the 1980s. Among others, his own encounter with Flusser in 1981 at a symposium in Vienna, where he convinced him to write for his journal *European Photography* – an invitation that would lead to a column by Flusser with significant implications for the reception of his theory of photography in the German speaking countries. Müller-Pohle also pointed out Flusser’s meeting with Joan Fontcuberta at the Symposium Primavera Fotogràfica a Catalunya (Spain) in 1984, or his meeting with Gottfried Jäger at a symposium in Bielefeld (Germany) in the same year. Such amendments, which would need to be included into the cartogram, not only show that even such synoptical diagrams are necessarily preliminary tools for the depiction and organisation of knowledge; tools that always need to be revised and amended if they want to remain useful for research.

But it also proves that such form of research is not only based on the work of the two authors credited in the cartogram’s upper left corner, that is, Clemens Jahn and myself. The work is dependent on a whole network of researchers and collaborators. Besides the already mentioned Monaí de Paula Antunes and Andreas Müller-Pohle, are Siegfried Zielinski, at the time director of the Vilém Flusser Archive and enabler of many other Flusser research projects, Baruch Gottlieb, his co-curator at the time; Marcel René Marburger and Lothar Hartmann, as well as the colleagues of the curatorial departments in Karlsruhe and Berlin. Like the network of supporters depicted in the cartogram it is such an assembly of collaborators and friends that made our research possible. They supported me with their expertise in the lengthy archival research that went into the cartogram.

² Mathew Richie (2018) *The Temptation of the Diagram*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

³ Donna Haraway (1988) “Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575-599, here 581.

