

Introduction

November 2013 marked the first time a Flusser Symposium took place in the United States. There have been several others over the last decade or so, in Switzerland, Germany, Brazil, and elsewhere, with differing foci that represented a diversifying landscape of international scholarship on Vilém Flusser and media studies. Media Studies, Digital Humanities, digital culture and other “new” media topics very much inform interdisciplinary scholarship in the US, and the 2013 symposium focused on remediation (based on Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter’s 2000 book with the same title) and ongoing changes in digital culture: “ReMEDIATING Flusser: The Humanities in the Digital Age” (<http://symposium.digitalmediauconn.org>).

The symposium sought to generate debate on more than Flusser’s thought alone, however, or to build on an increasing presence of Flusser’s work in the English-speaking publishing market. The humanities and arts, internationally, are at the point of an epistemological turn. How do we gain, analyze, and disseminate knowledge? How is knowledge organized and archived? How do we treat Western notions of creativity, imagination, and production in a multi-media and multi-lingual environment? These and other questions are at the forefront of humanistic endeavors in the digital age. It is, more urgently put, the task of the humanities to address these questions, and, most importantly, to contribute to the shaping of new knowledges and inquiries that are not accessible or initiated only in print and linear forms. Each new medium confronts and possibly channels a certain order of communication, study, and experience; and it is incumbent upon the humanities and arts to question and think about new orders and to design suggestions for the coexistence of different forms of knowledge, thought and ideas. How are we engaged in this process? What are the challenges, what are the benefits? What are the values? The symposium attempted to address some of these questions, in the interest of media studies research and digital humanities in a global context.

Importantly, this symposium commenced to take scholarship and the representation of Flusser’s work one step further: for three days, participants discussed a script to remediate Flusser’s main ideas and concepts for an online publication, forthcoming in 2015 on the platform Scalar (<http://scalar.usc.edu/scalar/>), entitled *ReMEDIAting Flusser: From the Print-Text to the Image-Flood. A Digital Humanities Project*, edited by Anke Finger. Concepts to be visualized, digitized, gamified or otherwise remediated include translation, the technical image, code, dialog/discourse, nomadism, language, play, and more. As such, the symposium and its outcomes present a novel approach to gener-

ate research on Flusser while applying Flusser's own methods to the exploration and dissemination of knowledge and ideas in the digital age.

Published within are selected papers from the symposium's two morning workshops; an article by Priscila Arantes' on post-history, technical images, and contemporary art that combines philosophical and curatorial perspectives; and a section on "Edith Flusser: In Memoriam" with several contributions remembering Edith Flusser (1920-2014).

Chadwick Smith offers a brief exploration of Vilém Flusser's proposed yet undeveloped concept of "new humanism" and argues for the centrality of the concept for a distinct ethical-political track that winds its way through all of his writings on communication, media, and technology, in addition to his explicit references to exile and nationalism. He also considers Flusser's demand for a new *humanism* an exemplary case for a relation to the master terms of the Enlightenment and humanistic investigation in the digital age, which persists after digitality even as they are recoded.

Gundela Hachmann shows that Flusser paints a dire picture for the future of literary writing. He contests that it is doomed to be replaced by automated language games. In that sense, one can see literature and the image-culture as antagonistic forces. Drawing on examples from contemporary German literature, however, she demonstrates in which ways the literary imagination may contribute to the formation of the techno-imagination by analyzing work from authors like Ulrike Draesner and Thomas Lehr. Ultimately, as Hachmann points out, the imaginative capacity of fictional literature provides a conceptual space in which a new awareness towards technical images is drafted, tested, and reviewed.

Ian Verstegen fills a gap in Flusser scholarship by conducting an initial comparison of Flusser with Rudolf Arnheim. After noting their similar approaches – open both to science and phenomenology – Verstegen looks closely at each theorist's respective theory of photography. Reflecting on each theorist's cautiously optimistic or pessimistic approach to evolving media, he concludes with thoughts on how they give helpful ideas on how to flesh out aspects of the other's thought.

Martha Schwendener suggests to reorient the field of U.S. art history by arguing strongly for an inclusion of Flusser's theory on photography. The photography specialization is fairly new and the discourse is dominated by a handful of voices like Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes, while Vilém Flusser has been virtually ignored. Her essay examines the trilogy of "technical image" texts Flusser wrote in the 1980s—*Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983), *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1985), and *Does Writing Have a Future?* (1987)—and beyond these, locating the seeds of Flusser's "photophilosophy" in his use of information and communications theory to develop concepts like "image," "apparatus," "program," and "information." It considers the U.S. art historical bias toward writers

like Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, and the “control society” ethos of Gilles Deleuze and Flusser’s proposal that technical images and photography criticism could provide models for creative disruption of apparatus and finally, “human freedom.”

Fiona Hanley’s creative essay explores the significance of the dialogical form of chiasmus for Flusser’s conception of gesture, arguing for an understanding of his “gesture of writing”, as a gesture of essaying. The essay itself sets up this argument through a gesture of essaying, placing Flusser into conversation with a broader discourse on writing and gesture.

Finally, Thomas Stubblefield’s contribution attempts to draw out the larger implications of the technical image’s cultural framework and the discursive regime of the camera by engaging with disaster photography, specifically, the seeming ubiquitous impulse to take pictures in the context of 9/11. Rather than supporting the ineffable of the sublime or unassimilable of trauma studies, Flusser’s ideas allow us to approach this scenario from a materialist framework, suggesting a unique camera consciousness of disaster which functions as a specific category within its larger program rather than its compromise or negation.

Priscila Arantes’ reflection on post-history, technical images, and contemporary art combines philosophical and curatorial perspectives. She brings concepts from Walter Benjamin and Vilém Flusser to bear upon the international exhibition she curated for the Paço das Artes in 2013 titled *Arquivo Vivo* [Live Archive]. Arantes emphasizes the wealth of Flusser’s contributions to the fields of Art, Design, and Media, which will be the focus of a future *Flusser Studies* issue. Her contribution is timely, given that Flusser’s work is currently being rediscovered in the United States. The art historian John Rajchman, for instance, emphasizes these “rich oblique histories” by calling attention to a certain “canonical provincialism” based in New York City. He pointed out that “it is the great Brazilian moment in which Flusser participated that matters for us today because it serves to provincialize Greenberg’s-style modernism as the crux around which everything turns; it helps us to see New York modernism as only a limited variant in a much more complicated story of writing and image carried on in many ways and places.”¹

The issue closes with a section on “Edith Flusser: In Memoriam.” She passed away peacefully in September 2014. Members of the *Flusser Studies* editorial team, as well as Andreas Ströhl, have provided brief recollections of her work and life. We would like to thank the Flusser Archive for contributing a short video essay with new footage about Edith; and we express our sincere gratitude to

¹ John Rachman, “Strange Trip: John Rajchman on Vilém Flusser’s ‘Curies’ Children’ (1986-92)” *Art Forum* (September 2012): 152-153.

Alena Wagnerová who has given us permission to upload an essay on Edith Flusser that appeared in 1995 in the collection *Prager Frauen*, edited by Wagnerová and published with the Stefan Bollmann Verlag. It presents Edith Flusser's early years in Prague, the intensive (working) relationship with Vilém, and the values she followed throughout her life and with her family. They are reunited in Prague.

Anke Finger, University of Connecticut (USA), Simone Osthoff, Pennsylvania State University (USA), November 2014