

Simone Osthoff**Dialogues Between Flusser and Young Media Artists**

Media archeologist Siegfried Zielinsky, the director of the Flusser archive, remarked in *Deep Time of the Media* on how Flusser's presence in the media debates of the 1980s was important for new media artists who wanted to change the world and saw no connection between their ideas and the more abstract Lacanian and poststructuralist theories. Therefore, they were thirsty for new viewpoints: "In his lectures, Flusser often jumped back and forth between the reality of facticity and fecund speculation, or sketched the identity of thought that operates within the strong tension of *curiositas* and *necessitas* (curiosity and necessity) as [Giovan Battista Della] Porta defined the two most important motivations for the work of the researcher. Flusser charismatically embodied this identity. [...] For established academe, his thinking, characterized by its mental leaps between the disciplines, is unacceptable even today."¹

This description of Flusser's lecturing style is probably what São Paulo multimedia artist Mario Ramiro means when he often states that Flusser had "*uma pegada de artista*" [an artist's hand/footprint/approach]. Among the numerous artists interested in Flusser and who continue to expand his legacy are a few who were "part" of the 1980s generation in Brazil. Lesser-known and more experimental, artists working with technology then were very interested in Flusser's transdisciplinary thinking, which encouraged their explorations of communication, science and technology as media for art making. That small minority set their eyes on a future they wanted to build. Among them are Eduardo Kac, who constructed the first holographic lab in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1980s, and Mario Ramiro who worked in São Paulo with heat sculpture and magnetic levitation. These artists of the 1980s generation engaged with issues of our times, more than the painters and critics, who in the 1985 São Paulo Bienal defined the 1980s generation in terms of postmodern neo-expressionism, irony and parody of the "return to painting" movement.

¹ Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and seeing by Technical Means* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 97.



Eduardo Kac and Mario Ramiro in São Paulo in the mid 1980s.

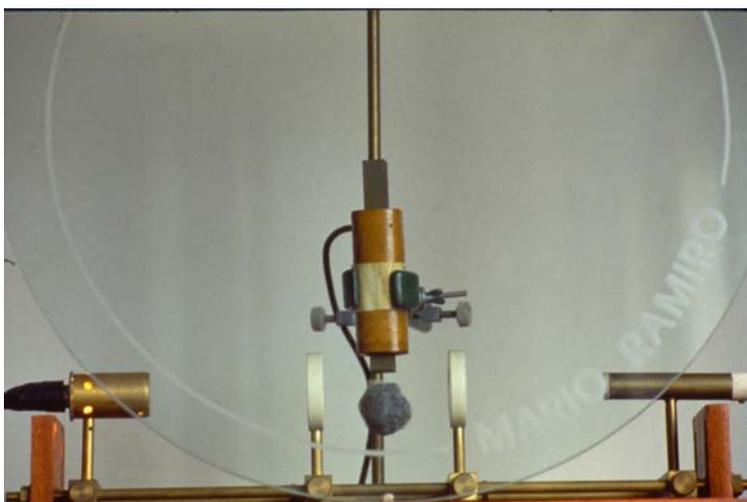
Kac and Ramiro also shared interests and a Telecommunications event in 1988 between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo that coupled fax and a live TV broadcast (image below). Ramiro was on a live TV program connecting—via fax— the public space of television to Kac’s private studio. They sent each other images that were in turn altered and sent back and forth.



Mario Ramiro and Eduardo Kac Retrato Suposto – Rosto Roto [Presumed Portrait—Broken Face]. The images above were taken from the live broadcast in 1988.

On April 2nd, 2009, I asked Ramiro, who currently teaches at the Escola de Comunicação e Artes of the Universidade de São Paulo, how he met Flusser and if he had actually studied with him in Europe. Ramiro: “I went to Germany thanks to a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) grant for which I had applied with the recommendations of two people: Prof. Walter Zanini and Prof. Vilém Flusser, who were fundamental influences during my university years. At the time, Prof. Zanini was head of the Art department at ECA [Escola de Comunicação e Arte of the Universidade de São Paulo], Prof. Flusser was a constant figure in meetings with students, in lectures in our school, and in other guest appearances in São Paulo in the late 70’s and early 80’s.

“I was a student of Gabriel Borba, Flusser’s assistant during his reformulation project for the São Paulo Biennial in the early 70’s. One day Gabriel brought the philosopher to talk with some young students who had no idea about the kind of impact new technologies had on Western culture. I was fascinated by the little old man on that occasion, and began to correspond with him. Years later, at KHM [*Kunsthochschule für Medien, Köln*, where the Flusser archive was first housed], I encountered a folder titled “correspondence with Brazilian artists,” in which I found, to my surprise, my letters full of hardly comprehensible passages, and some project designs — all organized in plastic folders! In 1988, during a symposium in São Paulo entitled “A casa da Cor,” Flusser and Gottfried Jäger, a German professor, lectured to a full-house at the Centro Cultural São Paulo— and afterwards, I managed to take them to my studio. At the time, I was working with magnetic levitation and heat radiating sculpture. Flusser convinced Prof. Jäger to accept me as a student and this led to my DAAD grant.



Mario Ramiro *Gravidade Zero (Zero Gravity)* 1986. Made of glass, brass and wood, the work utilizes an electromagnet regulated by a photoelectric sensor, which allows the levitation of small metallic objects in space.

“When I arrived in Germany in October of 1991, I had hoped to visit Flusser in Robion, where he lived. But in November he was in the automobile accident that took his life right after his first return to the Czech Republic. I was unable to personally thank him for the support and encouragement he had given me. This I do, nowadays, utilizing, for example the introduction to the re-edition of his book *Da religiosidade*,² in which I made a parody of one of Flusser’s own memorial texts about Vicente Ferreira da Silva (VF-S!). There are other small contributions like the publication of texts that he had sent me, still unedited, as well as the reflection on Flusser’s project for the São Paulo Biennial in 1973, which I am currently developing in relation to the 2008 “Bienal of the Void” for a future volume of *Flusser Studies*”.³

² Vilém Flusser, *Da Religiosidade: A Literatura e o Senso de Realidade [Of Religiosity: Literature and the Sense of Reality]*, 1967 (São Paulo: Escrituras, 2002).

³ Translation by Stephen Sinsley. Another article on the topic of Flusser and the São Paulo Bienal is by Ricardo Mendes, “Rumo ao exílio: Vilém Flusser, 1972,” published on the author’s web site only: <http://www.fotoplus.com/rico/rmbiocv.htm>. Also, in relation to Flusser and the Bienal please see: Mario Ramiro, “Um salto para um mundo cheio de deuses,” *ARS Revista de Pós graduação em artes visuais*, ECA-Universidade de São Paulo, No. 10 (2007): 32-37. Originally published in the *Caderno Mais! Folha de São Paulo*, May 26, 2002.