

Andreas Ströhl
Recollections of Edith Flusser

I.

Edith in Prague, November 26th 1991

Edith and Vilém Flusser are much enjoying a dinner in the apartment of Carola and Jochen Bloss on the Masarykovo nábřeží 32, although the conversation includes Jörg Haider and the rise of new nationalisms in Eastern and Southern Europe. Edith repeatedly covers her mouth with her hand when she laughs. Vilém explains that one of her front teeth recently broke off and that they will be on their way to the dentist in Germany very early the next morning. And, by the way, he expands, according to Jewish superstition, it signals the impending death of a family member when someone loses a tooth. The next day, both of them leave for Germany in the early morning hours as planned. They get into an accident even before they reach the border; Vilém dies.

II.

Edith in Strasbourg, March 21st/22nd 1992

The Friends of Vilém Flusser meet for the first time. I encounter Edith again for the first time since our dinner in November the night before Vilém's death. I hardly recognize her. The radiant, girlish – even at the age of 71 – lady has turned into a bent-over woman who seems to have aged quite suddenly. Certainly, she must reproach herself for Vilém's death; she sat at the steering wheel. Edith always loved driving, but one could not be faint of heart as her passenger. I do not approach her with questions about the obvious feelings of guilt, and I am sure no one else does. Not even to console her. The horror of what has happened is still felt too deeply and is too fresh.

III.

Edith in Graz, Fall 1994

After two previous Flusser-Symposia organized by the Goethe-Institute in Prague, another one is taking place in Graz under the auspices of the Styrian Fall festival. Edith has herself under control again. She has regained some of her old energy and charisma. She maintains a difficult balance between charismatic presence and discretion, just like in Prague in 1992 and during all subsequent Flusser-Symposia, given her very different relationship to Flusser than those of the participating

scholars and academics. Hubert Burda invites all attending friends of Flusser's to a glamorous dinner; Edith is beaming again. She is the actual host.

IV.

Edith in Munich, late 90s

Dinah (her daughter) is the Brazilian General Consul in Munich. Dinah, Edith and Benjamin (Dinah's son) live in a spacious 70s apartment in the Herzogpark. Almost every week, they have people over for dinner to discuss *topics*. When the dinner conversation turns out to be insufficiently monothematic or even disorganized, Edith calls the next morning and apologizes for the "failed evening." I help Edith out, on occasion, with translations in the little office on the Prinzregentenstraße, the precursor of the Flusser Archive. In return, she generously gives me extra copies from Vilém's library as well as exhibition catalogs and images. Once I even receive a house in Bohemia (which, as it turned out, had already been sold by Vilém in 1968).

V.

Edith on Barbados, February 2000

Dinah is the Brazilian Ambassador on Barbados. On this dream island, the Flussers live in a dream palace made of shell limestone. Jana and I spend a wonderful two-week visit there. Once again, I help Edith out a little with translations, but we spend most of our time at the pool in the morning and on the ocean in the afternoon, overlapping for a few days with another visitor, Dirk Matejovski. Already before noon, we *light* the first can of beer. Edith is proud of the monkeys that join us at the heavy shell limestone table during breakfast outside with papaya and cheese.

VI.

Edith in New York, starting in 2001

I visit Edith, Dinah and Benjamin repeatedly in their apartment on Broadway. Edith is now over 80 years old. She is full of energy and vigor at the beginning of the New York period, although this period, as if out of mockery, as if to say *here, too, you are not safe*, begins with the attacks on the World Trade Center. Then she begins to age. I first take notice during an interview in which the facts are not entirely straight anymore. Later I accompany her to the doctor. During my last visit in 2012 I help Victor (her youngest son), to carry Edith, light as a feather, around in the apartment. Edith cannot follow the conversations anymore, but she is in expressly good spirits, truly happy. When I leave I guess that it might be the last time.

VII.

When I remember Edith I first think of her determinacy, generosity, self-discipline and curiosity. Then I recall her Prague-German expressions. “To light the light” (instead of turning it on), to “give” something onto a place (instead of putting it somewhere). “Andreas, do you want to do this or that...” The Jewish-Czech-German high culture likely lost its last representative with Edith; I lost a person who was like a mother to me.

Photos: Jana Vymazalová (Edith, during the late 90s, in her Munich apartment at the Gumpfenberg, with Dinah and, respectively, with me)

Translated by Anke Finger