

Against digital obsolescence: the challenges of preserving cultural heritage in the “Ningunismo” Archive

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Abstract

The main objective of this research is to think about the cultural heritage of “Ningunismo” and its definitions through the preservation and cataloging of materials from different media, contained in a horizontal and communal archive with free online access. The focus is mainly on the hermeneutic conflict, originated after the death of the founders and how the mass media distorted its existence. The archive is composed of 500 items, 170 agents, and 30 places. The creation of a tree of elements helped to relate the different formats. From newspaper notes, to abandoned web pages, to papers at sociology conferences, any publication about or mentioning “Ningunismo” was included. Virtual material pertaining to disused web pages turned out to be the most numerous.

URL: <https://archivoningunismo.net.ar/>



Figure 1. “The story of four teens and an adventure that ended fatally”. Cover story of newspaper Clarin on December 19 2006. “These new urban tendencies”.

Proposal Guidelines

Our research begins in 2020 with the intention of tracing any kind of publication made by and about “ningunismo”. Born in 2001, “ningunismo” presented itself as a cultural phenomenon led by young adults and teens from the city of Buenos Aires who denied the possibility of a simple definition of their group. Their activities could be summarized as urban explorations, graffiti, street performance, parkour, the practice of chaos magic [1] (magick), and the militancy of their thoughts published online. Chaos magic teaches that beliefs are the fundamental building blocks of perception, and by consciously altering our beliefs, we can change the way we see the world. As a result, chaos magicians use language as a tool, usually developing unique magical systems and frequently borrowing from other traditions, religious movements, popular culture, and different philosophical schools.

Our starting point was the ningunist literature itself; its manifesto titled Thesis 222 [2], the first edition of which was published in 2003 and the book Ningunismo 2.0: Autarchy for the Masses [3] (2016). From this initial reading, we realized that ningunismo made very explicit its own theoretical framework. Authors such as Timothy Leary [4], Robert Anton Wilson [5], Guy Debord [6], George Gurdjieff [7], Jacques Bergier and Louis Pauwels [8], Hakim Bey [9], among others [10], appeared.

The ningunists saw the world as dominated by certain “tunnels of reality” that filter and shape people’s beliefs and experiences and attempted to question the hegemony of certain ways of understanding reality through specific language and actions. This led them to conceive a movement that would escape labels or closed definitions. On the night of December 16th, their leader Roy Khalidbhan and three other members made an urban exploration by entering the sewer into a piped river in Buenos Aires. They drowned after a storm broke out.

Since the tragedy of December 2006, the mainstream media such as Clarin and La Nación tried to define and categorize the group. Under the logic of the immediacy of the news and the trivialization of non-standardized voices, the hermeneutic conflict began, that is, the struggle to define concretely what ningunismo is.

In this context, Mónica Sierra, Roy’s mother, takes center stage and is interviewed by several graphic and audiovisual media. At the same time, Mónica began to be very active in the online forums and official websites of ningunismo. From then on, the materials bifurcate in two paths; the media understood in classical terms— newspapers, magazines and television— and the emergence of blog publications, forums, and independent media on the Internet and social networks. The digital material belonging to disused web pages turned out to be the most numerous and led to the search for specific tools such as Wayback Machine, HTTrack Website copier, Webrecorder Player, among others.

For the former, we contacted the archives of the public TV stations- RTA (Channel 7), Channel 9 and Telefé (Channel 10). All three had created an inventory and cataloged the raw footage as well as certain edited fragments. In the case of RTA, as a result of our request, magnetic BETACAM material dated between December/January 2006 and 2007 was digitized respectively. As for Telefé, access to view the material is restricted and we were only able to have access to the descriptive sheet of its catalog. The network only accepts orders for the purpose of selling the material and there is no possibility of consultation for academic research. In the case of the graphic media, the consultation was through the Newspaper Archives of the National Library. Taking into account the date of the tragedy, we were able to request the newspapers of Clarin, La Nación and Página 12 in order to document the development of the news in the days following the tragedy. In addition to the newspapers, we also documented magazines such as the Revista Viva—supplement of La Nación— and the Summa+ magazine, a magazine specialized in architecture. In parallel, we conducted interviews with two former members of Ningunismo whose testimony helped us have context and understand the internal organization of the group. We also conducted interviews with journalists and sociologists who wrote about the phenomenon of ningunismo.

Regarding native internet content, most of the documentation work was derived from the various captures (PDF, JPG, HTML, SWF, WARC) of web pages, forums, blogs and different social networks. The problems presented by web

pages are varied. The first is their potential mutability. The same domain (for example: www.ningunismo.com.ar) may have had several designs during its existence. We call them versions. As a first step, we check if the site is still online. If it is not online, we use the Wayback Machine [11] tool to search for a snapshot of the page. These snapshots are local mirrors that try to recover the navigability of obsolete designs from the early 2000s.

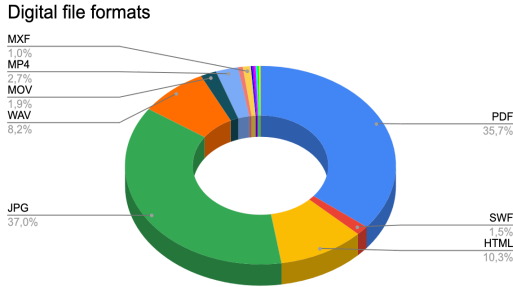


Figure 2. 3D Pie chart illustrating the different types of digital file formats found in Archivio Ningunismo.

Wayback Machine takes screenshots in two ways, at the user's request and randomly. The pages of "ningunismo" were archived randomly, and that is why each snapshot is incomplete with respect to what the site was originally. The way Wayback Machine displays the snapshots of the same URL is by date in a sort of calendar, year by year. The job of discriminating which snapshot has relevant information for our object in custody is to visualize each snapshot and distinguish design or content changes. It is also important to note that due to the random way of taking the screenshots it is impossible to know with certainty the precise moment when a change occurred because there are days when there are no screenshots.

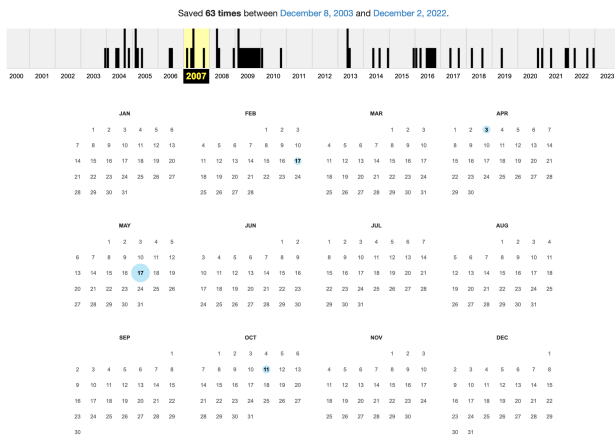


Figure 3. Wayback Machine's snapshot gallery.

This is where the general inexperience in archiving something like a web page comes into play. Not only do you want to preserve the content of the web page, but also its design and in that sense its navigation. As a first approach to this we turn to the PDF format. In any web browser you can save (or print) the web page you are viewing in this static format. This is a sort of photograph of the page in question but does not preserve its navigability or its source code (HTML in most cases). It must also be said that Wayback Machine fatally works in a contemporary browser with contemporary navigation rules. That is why pages from the era of Ningunismo do not work completely through the WM viewer. Many are presented substantially differently from how they were at the time. The clearest example of this is the obsolescence of the Macromedia

Flash Player. This application for interactive web design was widely used in the early 2000s and was discontinued in late 2020. The files generated with Flash have the SWF extension and today it is no longer possible to visualize them in a contemporary web browser. That is why the only way to view them is to download an SWF Player. Although this allows you to see the content of this fragment of a web page, this visualization decontextualizes the element from its previous location, in this case an HTML file. Another example of obsolescence is the closure of Yahoo Groups where there was a heated debate among several users whether the Ningunismo group was a cult or not. Since it is accessed with an account and considered private, it is not a web page that Wayback Machine has had access to archive so all that material has been lost. This is because Wayback Machine is an archiving tool strictly for public web pages.

In any case, it's important to remark that there have been initiatives to save a great majority of the Yahoo Groups content, a collaborative effort that stemmed from the both users and the preservation group called Archive Team [12]. The results of this project can be found in the Yahoo Groups Metadata Collection stored at Archive.org.

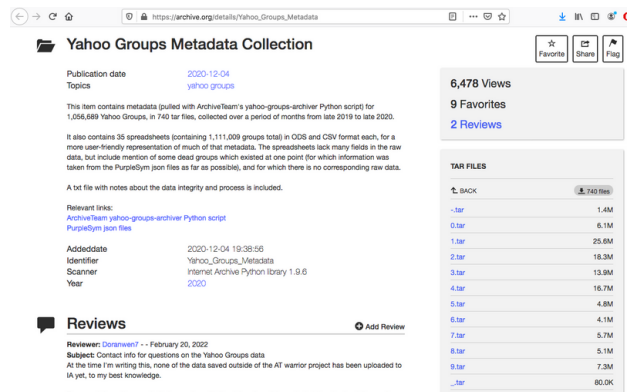


Figure 4. Yahoo Groups Metadata Collection stored at Archive.org.

Today, with the boom of social networks, the web archiving community is developing new tools for archiving non-public web pages. An example of this is WARcreate [13]. Beyond this, it is important to note that we have done the work of tracking, understanding and learning the best ways to archive a website, aiming for results that allow access to a faithful representation of the site and that the files are preserved in a folder structure that corresponds to the original. The name of these files are WARC files [14]. As always, in addition to preservation, is the ability to access the navigation and visualization of these pages. To date, WARC files are not supported by any web browser but there are two free access tools that exist. ReplayWeb [15], an online player for WARC files and a desktop version called Webrecorder Player [16]. It is worth noting that the WARC files of the ningunismo-related web pages were denied to us by Internet Archive without much argumentation, which not only makes the work difficult but also generates some unnecessary suspicion among people who belong to the digital preservation community and also raises the question of who owns these extinct web pages. In our opinion, it is legitimate to wonder about the authorship and who owns the rights to the orphaned web pages on the Internet.

With these difficulties we decided in principle to cover more ground although it is not ideal. We call this Phase 1 or the first phase of the creation of the archive. It is an action similar to what happens in archives such as film archives where there are not enough resources to "do what needs to be done" but the priority is to move towards preservation as opposed to non-preservation. Thus, in our case, some web pages become puzzles— where we have the HTML code on one side, the

images on the other and we also have the SWF files, the extension of the animations made in Flash Player. Our goal is to preserve all the content we have collected to start to build the archive in a WARC file format. We are actively working on generating WARC files of the obsolete Ningunismo pages for their preservation, as well as the generation of a Virtual Machine [17] to provide access to these pages as they were conceived in their time. An example of this is the project titled Oldweb.today [18]. It is an emulator for different online web explorers and is compatible with Wayback Machine.

Of the pages that are still online we were able to generate mirrors with the HTTrack Website Copier [19] tool. Although it does not directly generate WARC files, it does generate a mirror of the site to be copied. That is to say that it recovers all its functionality, but it is not a format meant for preservation. Another very useful tool was GNU Wget [20] to create mirrors for web pages using the command line.

```
$ wget \
--recursive \
--no-clobber \
--page-requisites \
--html-extension \
--convert-links \
--restrict-file-names=windows \
--domains website.org \
--no-parent \
www.website.org/tutorials/html/
```

Figure 5. GNU Wget command line prompts.

Lastly, it's important to highlight the existence of other software by command line capable of generating mirrors of the pages stored in Wayback Machine. This tool is called Wayback Machine Downloader [21].

Upon completion of Phase 1 of documentation, it became evident that most of the archive is made up of a variety of digital material. Prior to the creation of the database, it was first necessary to establish a hierarchical order of the types of material contained in the archive. The concept of a "tree of elements" facilitated practical purposes of order, access and how to relate all the different elements to each other.

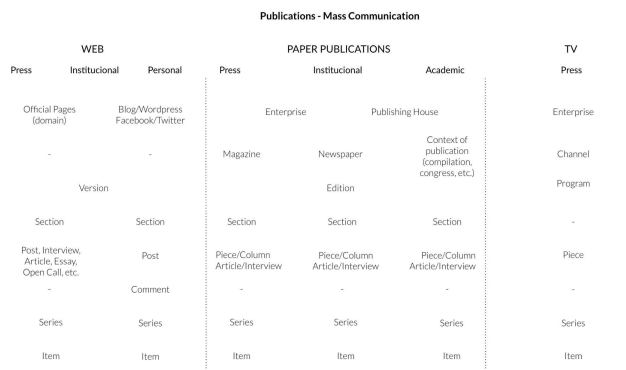


Figure 6. Tree of Elements for Mass Media publications.

The database, in timeline format, is in the process of being edited to the Ningunismo archive web page. This is the second design. Originally, we were working directly with code (Java, HTML and CSS) to create an original and interactive timeline. But the construction process made us spend a lot of time on the

mechanics of the page and we preferred to go with something more direct and accessible. It was important to have easy readability that emulated the style of other pages of the 2000's implemented by the ningunistas. The visibility of the tags was also important to start generating direct relationships between agents, places, and elements, all serving as entry points to deepen research. In addition, the ability to create hidden tags helped us to weave our own information network, providing precise connection points with hyperlinks. Although not all of them are visible, tags connect posts to other posts, creating another, almost infinite, method of organization. The use of this tool also made us think about the possibility of generating several hyperlinks to different data sheets. In such a way that this interconnectivity and interaction of the user with the information starts to generate new actions and rhythms. The icons on the right represent different media formats and when clicked they also create another way of organizing the material. The items are visible in several screenshots that when clicked can be expanded and examined with greater clarity.

The importance of the horizontality of the archive also applies to the design layout. Everything is given equal importance in the eyes of the reader in terms of the distribution and hierarchy of information. When organizing the information that defines each item, we realized that the same characteristics cannot be applied to everything. For example, a blog post does not have a location, but it has other important defining data. Additionally, finding these new ways of categorization and definition helped us to create order. Each datasheet serves as a guide to understand the item and in the future we will apply the same categorization to the internal database.

Timeline Event Name: "Kensosis Group forms for panels with Mónica Sierra."
Agents: Mónica Sierra, Rodrigo Sierra, Vanessa Ferrari, Andrés Frasca, Diego García, Vanessa Moccagatta.
Location: Galería Las Vegas
Active: 1998 - [2002]
Ref. Item #: NIN032

Observations: Group that met to read and discuss various topics such as metaphysics and Christian esoterics.
Tags: kensosis-group, book, Belgrano, Mónica-Sierra, Hermeticism, Hermetism, Christian-esotericism.

Figure 7. Example of a datasheet.

Including several web pages in the archive, we also decided to create a new category of organization using color coding called "URL status". Online URLs are pages that are currently active and can be viewed in contemporary browsers. The assigned color is green. Offline URLs are pages that are known to exist but are not online and were not archived by the Wayback Machine. That is, for the time being, they do not exist. Their color is red. The third category is "Wayback", which refers to pages that are currently only hosted on their platform. Their color is yellow. Finally, the fourth category is called "Mirror" which refers to pages that are already part of our archive as mirrors or local copies. Its color is blue.

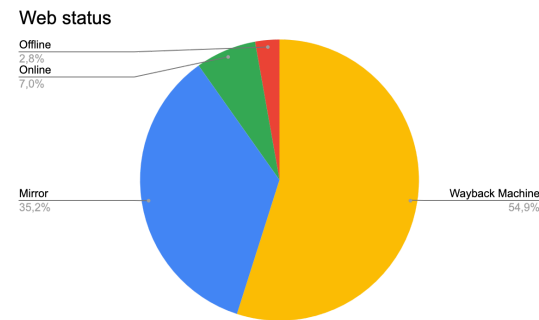


Figure 8. Pie chart illustrating different types of web status found in the archive.

As one can see, in the graph of figure 8, we decided to show it with this color coding for the status of web pages. However, we are currently working on switching from color coding to another signifier such as patterns (dashed/dotted lines, circles, etc.) trying to make it usable for color blind people.

Among other things, it has been decided that the main form of access to the archive will be the Timeline. This creates a primary entry way through the chronology of the events themselves. Due to the nature of our objects in question, the ability to display the archive in chronological order provided a more horizontal narrative to all the elements. Since ningunismo itself was a social phenomenon it seemed imperative to show how it developed.

During our initial research on timelines [22] we guided ourselves by the simplicity of the design, its interactivity with the user, its legibility when facing concrete data, and the relationship between links and images. We originally chose the platform CodePen [23] to create our first web design for the archive. This tool allowed us to manipulate the code directly from the browser and visualize the results in the act of editing. Among the CodePen community almost all the designs are public and open source. The process of construction was important to understand the mechanisms of the webpages built with HTML, CSS, and Javascript but it took up a lot of our time. Following our original ideas of style and concept we decided to go with a ready-made design by Cargo [24] for the base of the site which would be direct and accessible for us to manipulate. It was important that the webpage be easy to read and emulate the style of other webpages from the 2000s.

The archive is not only composed of "objects in custody" but also records interpersonal meetings, decisions, and immaterial moments in the life of ningunismo. This new material, the product of the interviews we have conducted, although conducted with the purpose of stitching together unconnected moments or events, has surprisingly generated new questions. What was supposed to be explanatory becomes opaque at random points in the history of Ningunismo. Thus, the user of the web page, it is calculated, will end up generating questions and those questions will be the basis for new investigations with the support of those in the Ningunismo community. The project is now online since February 22nd and it can be accessed by the URL: <https://archivoningunismo.net.ar>. We have created a Google Form, accessible on our webpage for users to submit their own materials for consideration. Recently we received donations of webpages from the ningunist community and the response has been positive toward our preservation initiative.

In the future, we would like to take into consideration comments from professionals such as Clara Sánchez-Dehesa, Peter Bubestinger, Julián Mónaco, Elina Adduci Spina, about the utility of the archive, its theoretical foundations, and design elements, as well as presenting our webpage at other conferences.

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- [10] Carroll, P. (2021). Liber Null y Psiconauta. Aurora Dorada, Mack, B. (2005). Poker Without Cards: A Consciousness Thriller. Lulu.com.
- [11] Wayback Machine is a service and database that contains copies of a large number of Internet pages or sites which are public. It was launched in 1996 by Internet Archive.
- [12] Archive Team is a group dedicated to digital preservation and web archiving that was co-founded by Jason Scott in 2009. Its primary focus is the copying and preservation of content housed by at-risk online services such as GeoCities, Yahoo! Video, Google Video, SoundCloud, and others.
- [13] WARcreate is a Google Chrome browser extension that allows users to create a WARC archive of any web page that is browsable. The tool is an evolving product in order to mobilize a personal way of archiving web pages. It was launched by Google in 2012.
- [14] The Web ARChive Format specifies a method for combining multiple digital resources into an aggregated archive file along with related information. First specified in 2008, WARC is now recognized as the standard to follow for web archiving.
- [15] ReplayWeb.page is an open-source viewer intended to be used with a web browser that allows the user to upload WARC files and create a rendering for browsing.
- [16] Webrecorder Player is a desktop application for viewing WARC files with high quality locally without internet connection. Created in 2017 by Rhizome.
- [17] A Virtual Machine is a computational resource that uses software instead of a physical computer to run programs and launch applications. One or more virtual machines run on a physical Host or host machine. This means that a virtual Mac OSX machine can run on a physical Windows machine.
- [18] OldWeb.today allows users to browse the web using one of several emulated browsers as well as a Flash emulator, all running fully in the browser.
- [19] HTTrack Website Copier is a program that allows you to download a web page to a local directory, building all the directories with HTML, images and other files from the server.
- [20] GNU Wget is a free software package for retrieving files using HTTP, HTTPS, FTP and FTPS, the most widely used Internet protocols. It is a non-interactive command line tool, so it may easily be called from scripts, cron jobs, terminals without X-Windows support, etc.
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- [23] CodePen is an online community for testing and showcasing user-created HTML, CSS and JavaScript code snippets. It functions as an online code editor and open-source learning environment.
- [24] Cargo is a professional site building platform for designers and artists.

Author Biography

Lucas Larriera (1988) studied at Universidad del Cine (FUC). Since 2013 he has taught in the Sound Department at Universidad del Cine (FUC). In 2021, he earned his Masters in Archival Practices and Audiovisual Preservation at Elías Querejeta Zine Eskola in San Sebastián and participated in the academic investigation "Perdidas de Generación" led by the University of Basque Country. He is co-founder of the digital preservation project Archivo La Esquina based in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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