

EDITORIAL

BIRGITTA HOSEA*

PEDRO SERRAZINA**

TEREZA STEHLIKOVA***

This issue of the International Journal of Film and Media Arts presents selected papers from the fourth *Ecstatic Truth* symposium held at the University of Westminster, London, in May 2019. This annual symposium was founded in 2016 to explore issues arising from the interface between animation (in all its forms) and documentary (conceptualised very broadly as non-fiction), with a particular interest in the questions raised by experimental and practitioner perspectives. According to Werner Herzog, mere facts constitute an accountant's reality, but it is the ecstatic truth (a poetic reality) that can capture more faithfully the nuances and depths of human experiences. Given that animation (or manipulated moving image in all of its expanded forms) has the freedom to represent, stylize or reimagine the world, it lends itself well to this aspirational form of documentary filmmaking.

For this fourth edition of *Ecstatic Truth*, our intention was to examine the potential of the animation medium, in its most expanded form, to make sense of our reality: in its encounter with matter, through all our senses. While existing in an academic context, we are keen to ground this selection of papers in the tacit knowledge of artists and filmmakers, because we trust the body houses wisdom that can only be accessed on its own terms, through making, which is also a way of thinking. The papers gathered here present

* University for the Creative Arts (United Kingdom)

** Universidade Lusófona (Portugal)

*** University of Westminster (United Kingdom)

practitioner perspectives on the materiality and process of making animation. They raise questions of provisionality and uncertainty; of facts, philosophies and even moving images: questions implicit in the subjectivity of perception and the unpredictability of matter. Made from the animation of raw materials such as mud, paint and cel and the re-animation of archival images such as analogue film, old home movies and other found footage, these works demonstrate how animation itself might embody reality as a process of becoming, of transformation, in a way that is unique to this art form. What can animation and its process reveal to us about our own way of making sense through our senses? What happens in an encounter between the hand and the material that might bypass the intellect and is revealed through the process of making? What does the hand that draws teach us about looking and what is the role of the whole body in making sense of the world?

The papers selected for this issue demonstrate the wide range of forms that contemporary animation can take. In 'Faithfully Animating The Truth', Terry Wragg, who is one of the original founder members of the Leeds Animation Workshop, recounts the last forty years of this animation cooperative: a period in which their technique changed from fully painted cel to cut-out animation and their focus changed from social issues explored through narrative to documentary. Suzie Hanna is another well-established UK animator, prominent in the field of poetry animation. In 'Animating Poetry: Whose Line Is It Anyway? Creation and Critique Of Shared Language In Poetry Animation', she details the different relationships between poetry and animation, with a specific case

study of her own film, *Know Unto God* (2016), an animation based on a poem by the New Zealand poet Bill Manhire. The poem serves as a series of 11 epitaphs to unknown soldiers capturing their life and death in a few short lines. Hanna's film animates the visceral textures of mud and raw pigment in combination with Manhire's poetry as a form of ecstatic truth to portray the horrific experience for soldiers in the First World War.

Moving away from the traditional form of the single-screen, animated short film, Natalie Woolf and Carolina Martins consider how animation might be used as part of a spatial experience to evoke subjective states. In 'Can Animation Take Our Breath Away? Expanded Animation For A Shared Physical Understanding', they propose to create a new work to explore the material expression of spatial phobia through animated installation and expanded media.

The final three papers concern the manipulation of film. Jennifer Nightingale's 'Cornish Knitting Pattern film series' describes her highly original method for creating structural film based on the use of visual charts formed out of traditional Cornish knitting patterns for frame-by-frame image capture. In knitting together images of the Cornish landscape, this methodology creates connections between traditional female labour practices in textiles and film editing. Patti Gaal-Holmes is concerned with the role of chance and accidental processes in analogue film making. In 'Process and Temporality: Chance and (Al)chemical Traces Invigorating Materiality and Content in the films of Péter Forgács, Penny Siopis and Ben Rivers', she argues that the material of analogue

film and the chemicals used to process it have a vitality of its own. In the works of the filmmakers she discusses, mistakes, accidents, deterioration and the unexpected marks made in hand-processing become like a form of animation that undermine the traces of the photo-chemical past to reveal unconscious truths beyond photographic representation. This concept is further developed by Michael Schofield. Adopting Derrida's notion of the presence of the absent past that haunts the present, Schofield conceptualises the use of re-vitalised archival materials as hauntological. In 'Re-Animating Ghosts Materiality and Memory in Hauntological Appropriation', he argues that the re-animation and re-appropriation of archival images in documentary practice demonstrates a refutation of the supposed 'truth' of the indexical image and, furthermore 'the trace is as much a temporal illusion in the still photograph or in film, as it is in a cartoon'. His argument about the illusory nature of the photographic image's claim to be 'truth' forms an important part of the case for animation to be used as a form of documentary.

The collection of papers in this issue demonstrate a breath of approaches that confirm the potential of animation as a poetic filmmaking strategy at the crossroads of the moving image, revealing the layers, from the sensuous and personal to the analytical and theoretical, that compose the real. We, the Guest Editors, intend it as a contribution to debates on the crossover between animation and other filmmaking practices and hope you, the Reader, will find this issue a stimulating read. We look forward to meeting you at our future *Ecstatic Truth* conferences - the 5th edition will take place in Vienna in April 2020.

