

EDITORIAL

This special issue of the International Journal of film and Media Arts, the second dedicated to Ecstatic Truth, contains a selection of articles that were originally presented at the 5th edition of that international symposium.

Founded in 2016, the symposium's aim was and is to explore issues arising from the relationships between all forms of animation practice and documentary (conceptualised very broadly as non-fiction), with a particular interest in the questions raised by experimental and practitioner perspectives. An expression coined by director and documentary-maker Werner Herzog, ecstatic truth is the poetic reality that can capture more faithfully the nuances and depths of human experiences, as opposed to the mere facts that constitute an accountant's reality. Given that animation (or manipulated moving image in all its expanded forms) has the freedom to represent, stylize or reimagine the world, it lends itself well to this aspirational form of documentary filmmaking.

Titled *The Age of the Absurd*, the 5th Ecstatic Truth edition was organized in conjunction with Under_the_Radar Symposium, in Austria, during the pandemic year of 2020, its title reflecting in many ways the unexpected challenges the world was to face during that period. The topic of the Absurd stemmed from the pre-pandemic sense of a world sociologically, politically, and ecologically in chaos. The editors desire was to seek out creative responses to the absurdity of a world being run by the pursuit of profit regardless of its sustainability, and the call for papers raised similarly engaged questions: Can we use animation in an activist way, to re-animate our conscience? Can we creatively challenge all the doom and gloom, and use our

creative practice to navigate and challenge the absurd of our everyday lives? What is the role of humour, surrealism, the historic strategies of the Absurd and Central European Existentialism? Ultimately, why does animation matter?

The responses were many and varied in their scope. The editing process went through a first stage in which proposals were selected for presentation at the symposium and, afterwards, the authors presented finished articles which went through a blind peer-review procedure.

We are happy to invite you to read the results of that thorough process. In the following articles you will find:

Holger Lang, director of *Under_the_Radar* and co-organizer of *Ecstatic Truth 2020*, reflecting on the difficulties of putting the symposium together and the impact of the 2020 pandemic in festivals and academic gatherings. Lang accepts the adjustments imposed by a post-pandemic period and the necessity to reduce carbon footprints but highlights the advantages of in-person events, and the importance of personal contacts beyond the mere presentation of articles that the digital conference formats impose.

In "Hitting Where it Hurts", **Gabriele Jutz** discusses absurdity as an artistic method. Using works from Birtwistle, Lorenzo Proctor, Vasof and Renoldner, artists working at the crossroads between animation and documentary, she documents practices that transgress traditional approaches and, as a consequence, disrupt expectations and established power relations. Jutz proposes that absurd strategies have a creative, disrupting power and suggests they can be seen as a potential response to our contemporary condition.

Also intent on questioning the context in which he works and his surrounding environment, **Max Hattler** looks at his own practice to propose abstract aesthetics and animation as a method to "question, undermine and transcend everyday sources". Hattler argues for an inquisitive practice that does

not seek to represent reality and uses animation to create "thinking spaces" and an Abstracted Real that reflects social, cultural, and political spaces.

Reacting to the first anniversary of the Grenfell tragedy, **Oliver Gingrich** and **Sara Choudhrey** describe a workshop series they curated as part of the AYAH-Sign project. A collaborative, community-based, participatory effort, these workshops consisted of an exploration of Islamic pattern-making with the aim of bringing the community together through artistic practice. The resulting site-specific installation, the authors suggest, contributed to social cohesion and mental wellbeing, acting as a creative support to a bereft community.

In "Dance, Long Exposure and Drawing: An Absurd Manifesto About the Female Body", **Zeynep Akcay** explains the production and aesthetic choices behind her film "Kam", a long-exposure pixilation/2D animation short. "Kam", shaman in old Turkish, presents a woman's intense dance and serves as a symbolic response to the rise of a conservative and misogynist official discourse in Turkey.

The last three articles reflect on the practice of animation as a response to very personal contexts.

Orla McHardy's essay interrogates the value of labour and whether it is placed (or not) on the hidden and time-consuming realm of domestic work and caregiving. McHardy considers the parallels between motherhood and animation practice, the constant interruption and exhaustion of the caregiver reflected in what the author calls "the breakages in animation".

In "Bearing Witness: Autoethnographic Animation and the Metabolism of Trauma - A Multimethod Investigation", **Susan Young's** deeply personal experiences spur the motivation to use autoethnographic animation as a means to moderate psychological trauma. Young compellingly argues that the whole animation process, from writing to public screenings

and symposia, helps re-empowering the individual and reduce trauma-related damage.

Finally, in "Shades of Invisibility", **Sally Pearce** describes the difficulties faced as an independent animator. Chernobyl Journey, her in-progress animation feature film, embodies the process through which she unveils invisible links and establishes a poetic and physical connection between her trips to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, a life-changing illness and personal loss. Although highly personal and intimate, Pearce's approach is simultaneously activist and engaged, a practice of resistance in times of neo-liberal economy crisis, ecological disaster, and global injustice.

We hope you enjoy this contribution to the growing body of knowledge on practices of animation that reflect, experiment and speculate how the animated (or expanded manipulated image) form might elicit different facets of poetic truth through its unique language.

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