DIFFRACTIONS
GRADUATE JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE

Nº6 - 2nd series // July 2023

EDITORIAL: IMAGES IN MOVEMENT

SARA MAGNO
Universidade Católica Portuguesa
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5550-4578
saramagnum@gmail.com

EKATERINA CORDAS
Universidade Católica Portuguesa
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0592-8791
katiacordas@gmail.com

DOI [10.34632/diffractions.2023.13356]

How do we read images, and is "reading" the right word to describe the relation that we, as scholars, establish with our objects of analysis? What are the methods that can be applied to the study of moving images? This number of Diffractions has a story that began with these questions. It seemed at the time, when we were both at the stage of developing methodologies for conducting our own doctoral research, that it was difficult to directly address the question of the method. We started engaging with other scholars, and we saw that many would happily speak about their objects, but would, at first, reluctantly share the process of their work. In order to deepen our mutual desire to seek meaning in moving images and systemize the various interdisciplinary approaches we encountered, we organized a workshop where we invited people from different fields of research whose work relied mainly on the analysis of the cultural meaning of moving images, to expose and speak about their working methods. The workshop "On research methods in Film Studies" (2020) provided a platform for both a sharing and testing of new methodologies of analysis and for discussing the usefulness of older methodologies in this field of research. The difficulty we faced in the beginning was translated into the complexity of both the objects of analyses and the applied approaches that varied immensely from each contribution to the workshop. What was more relevant about

Diffractions // Graduate Journal for the Study of Culture // N°6 - 2nd Series // July 2023 DOI [to be filled out by the editors]

this moment of sharing was the recognition of the creative methods the objects themselves demanded. We could say that any method that was put forward to analyze moving images had to adjust to the movements these images were producing in and outside of their own framework.

The initial desire to share different working methods gained even more traction after the invitation to turn the workshop into an issue for Diffractions. We were interested in observing how people would react to an open call on research methods for Film Studies. Proposals arrived with a surprising range of objects of study, from documentary films to online videogames, and from animation to Sci-fi films. What became clear, though, when we started collecting the contributions, was that this issue was no longer simply about methods, but it included a meta-discourse that involved the concept of movement. And the title of the issue was born - *Images in Movement.*

On the most basic level substituting film with "images in movement" in the title permits us to travel to the origins of the field and revive the fascination with motion that propelled the medium forward (think of the zoetropes that played around with creating the illusion of movement and the use of expressions like "moving pictures" or "motion pictures" to describe film). In this sense, what we present in this sixth issue are texts that embrace movement as a change through time - its historical dimension. Articles that we gather here speak of films produced as early as the 1930s, and then span to cover much recent creations.

Highlighting movement permits us as well to initiate a conversation on the ontology of cinema and the ways that, historically, Film Studies become a research field encompassing more than just film. Over the last 30 years, cinema and visual art have developed a closer relationship, mutating and affecting each other. Along with debates about film, art and philosophy, there are studies on documentary and ethnographic film, which have evolved into their own branch of Film Studies, with a particular focus on theoretical and ethical questions posing what reality is and how it can be portrayed. The materialist turn, for instance, has played a crucial role in the development of this field of research by critically reviewing depictions of other-than-human ontologies and addressing the posthuman condition with renewed focus. Another intriguing connection between the arts and cinema has to do with how the filmmaking process is adapting to the different types of moving images in the digital world, including animation, videogames, video installations,

Diffractions // Graduate Journal for the Study of Culture // N°6 - 2nd Series // July 2023 DOI [to be filled out by the editors]

virtual reality, etc. More and more, we are seeing a certain "blurring" between these categories and the way they increasingly interrelate with each other. For example, Lev Manovich (2002) addresses this aspect when he identifies that while we are entering the 'digital age,' we regularly witness a resurgence of nineteenth-century techniques of animation. These techniques are commonly seen when artists choose to not only record images but also to manually construct them, thus turning cinema into what Manovich characterizes as no longer an indexical media technology but a sub-genre of painting. This also goes along with the rise of interest in connecting Film Studies with Animation Studies and no longer looking at these spheres separately.

Another aspect of movement that we embrace is socio-political. With this issue, we wanted to highlight the significant shift that occurred from aesthetic to social practices within Film Studies from the late 1990s onwards. This goes along with the increasing necessity to address the idea of identities in movement and the accompanying discourses that problematize the production of images by queer identities, racial minorities, and other communities that were predominantly put to the margins of society. Some of the texts selected here turn to this dimension to speak of how their objects of study function as democratic exercises that work to construct, deconstruct, and problematize mainstream cultural identities.

Last but not least, with this accent on motion, we want to speak of movement as a method in itself that is specifically adequate for scholars embracing various film practices - be it imprinted on celluloid film, or circulating in digital hard-drives or the webs of the online world - as a research methodology. With these questions in mind, we assembled this issue and invite you to read the articles and essays presented here.

We open the main thematic section of our number with "Making Paradise: *The Island of Demons*," which we believe to be a significant contribution on visual anthropology, otherness, and documentary practice as research co-authored by Louise von Plessen and Gustavo Amaral. By focusing their analyses on a unique and rare object of study, Friedrich Dalsheim's film "The Island of Demons" (1933), Plessen and Amaral outline, in a comprehensive way, what is most fundamental for the practice of visual anthropology. The text addresses the main concerns associated with ethnographic practice and its colonial legacy. It is argued that in the making of this film, the director attempted for the first time to disentangle ethnographic film

Diffractions // Graduate Journal for the Study of Culture // N°6 - 2nd Series // July 2023 DOI [to be filled out by the editors]

from the entertainment of an audience eager to see images of the "exotic" other. The film, therefore, is presented here as one of the first attempts to decolonize film practices associated with ethnographic practices by adopting what at the time was considered new: an approach without imposing a Westernized perspective. Contrary to that, the filmmaker adopted a methodology in which participant observation and field research were employed to achieve what can be called "ethnographic truth" - a controversial term that was revealed to be relevant to Film Studies and other theories of the moving image ever since. In this text, Plessen and Amaral present us with a method of analysis of *The Island of Demons* that prioritizes an overview of the historical context, in this case, the colonial context, in which the film was produced. We learn from their analysis that the process and methods of making this film were at odds with the main filming currents of its time. Already carving a path for anti-colonial visual anthropology as a methodology, the authors explain how film can embody the sensory and affective experiences of others without falling into racist stereotypes. The fact that the text is referencing a film produced in 1933 for the purpose of calling attention to humanistic, empathetic, and even post-colonial ethnographic cinema, is because it is still relevant to consider some of the basic principles of ethnographic practice. Authors such as Sarah Pink (2013), referenced in the text, but also David Macdougal (2019), have more recently been theorizing on how a practice of sensory ethnography can be implemented; what are the risks still latent in this practice; and what methods are available to avoid the process of "othering." We believe that Plessen and Amaral's text is a critical contribution to this theoretical/practical universe.

In line with concern on processes of "othering" and colonial legacies in our current society is also the contribution by Eva Kruijt, "Not Made for you: the genre of Man in the *BlackTransArchive."* Kruijt's text, placed after Plessen's, holds a performative role within this issue, where the reader can witness a shift from one kind of image - the documentary/ethnographic image - to another kind of imagery, namely, the *BlackTransArchive*, an online videogame that, on a basic level, functions as an archive for Black trans experiences but in fact does more thatn that. Adopting a method of close reading, the author takes us on a journey through the videogame, and even if readers have not yet the opportunity to play it, they will feel that they are not missing anything, for this accurate description will take them into the subtext of the different possible directions of the game. In the author's own

Diffractions // Graduate Journal for the Study of Culture // N°6 - 2nd Series // July 2023 DOI [to be filled out by the editors]

words, the aim is to explores "the ways in the *BlackTransArchive* reflects on the implicit societal norms that are in place regarding what it means to be a human being" (Kruijt 2023, 26). This seems to be no easy task, but, in fact, Kruijt's close reading is presented to us critically and comprehensively woven alongside a theoretical background of references that range from Sylvia Winter, Donna Haraway, Eva Hayward, and Che Gossett, to shed light into how the *BlackTransArchive* can challenge the genre of Man's categorization, defining, and claiming that which it does not comprehend. In parallel to this, this text points at how real-world inequalities, such as those based on race and genre, are manifested in online spaces and communities; and how, although grounded in fantasy, certain elements of videogame culture directed at the white cis male can impact reality and function as fertile soil for racism. Moreover, this text is a deep reflection on the role of intersectionality through the negative performance of the game, which excludes black cis women from its archive. Kruijt's interpretation turns this exclusion into a strength of the game to make us consider what white cis male culture has accomplished in terms of inclusion/exclusion of what it understands and what it does not. According to Kruijt, the *BlackTransArchive* refuses to function as a tool for Man's entertainment, but it chooses not to revolve around black trans pain and trauma as well. Instead, it promotes bodies that do not need to *pass* to exist, bodies can be incomprehensible, cyborg-like even, and still be empowered.

The following contribution, Gloria Adjeiwaa Fofie's, "Correlation Between Afrofuturism and Science Fiction in *Space is the Place*: Praxis or Paradox?", brings the reader even closer to a vision of Black communities' empowerment. Adopting a method of close reading to the film *Space is the Place* - a film that has not got unnoticed, either as a cult film or as an object of reference for the theorization of Afrofuturism as a specific subgenre of Sci-fi - the author lead us into seeing the film with renewed focus. In fact, Afrofuturism is seen through Fofie's eyes as a mode rather than a genre, thereby interrogating the adequacy of generic categorizations as a sufficient method for analyzing this particular film. Beginning with a problematization of the notion of blackness and the apparent segregation portrait within the film, the author then addresses different references such as Darko Suvin (1974), Mark Sinker (1992), Tobias van Veen (1996), Hayward (2004), as well as David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith (2020), among many others, to explore the methodological potential of the science fiction genre and to, in the

Diffractions // Graduate Journal for the Study of Culture // N°6 - 2nd Series // July 2023 DOI [to be filled out by the editors]

words of the author herself: "support the notion of Afrofuturism as a powerful critical lens that can subvert these stereotypes by reclaiming fundamental reality reflections that speak to the humanity of blackness and projecting them into the future" (Fofie 2023, 47). The text ends with a bold and personal affirmation of *blackness as science fiction in and of itself,* which for us as editors of this issue of Diffractions, together with the previous contributors, also represents the epitomization of a necessary affirmation of a group of junior researchers in the search for their voice within the academia. Diffraction's *Images in Movement* depicting matters related to otherness, Black and Trans experiences deserve the type of in-depth analysis that we find here. In fact, we believe that instead of stagnating these images under one interpretation, they contribute to accelerating their movement outside their actual frames. They represent committed situated perspectives that constitute a branch of the study of culture unavoidably dealing with visuality and representation to ask how and under which conditions the production of meaning is being shaped by racialized and gendered experiences within our contemporary society.

The following two texts that constitute our main section continue the theme of images in movement and combine documentary film and animation. Raising to the surface two seemingly distant subjects, they both can, in fact, be linked by the question that scholars Maria Voukena and Ioulia Mermigka present to us: "What else is art but the public sharing of intensely personal experiences or ideas?" (Kötting 2016).

The article "Andrew Kötting's *Louyre: This Our Still Life*. An Archival Reading" engages with the work of the experimental British filmmaker Andrew Kötting. Maria Voukena and Ioulia Mermigka offer the readers a deep and creative analysis of his art. They focus not only on the method of the close reading of the documentary film announced in the title but weave in a dialogue between his diverse oeuvre spanning almost thirty years and extensive theory starting with Derrida's psychoanalytic deconstruction of the concept of the archive. The result is a strong and grounded article that positions the object of their study within a democratic horizon linking it with discourses of disability, care, and non-patriarchy. Mermigka and Voukena put the film within the context of cultural politics and argue that it can be read as "anarchival" – a work that subverts the dominant cultural narratives and enunciates itself as a "counter-archive" – a poetic act of

Diffractions // Graduate Journal for the Study of Culture // N°6 - 2nd Series // July 2023 DOI [to be filled out by the editors]

deconstruction of the autobiographical narrative of family trauma. The authors unveil the process of an artist's attempt to turn personal into political. Kötting's *Louyre: This Our Still Life* is essentially an art/home movie created within twenty years of living in a voluntary exile in a remote farmhouse in the Pyrenees. It tells the story of the filmmaker's daughter Eden who was born with a medical condition and whose fleeting life became the focus of his unique artistic corpus of work that, in a sense, became the manifest of the father's anarchic drive to both preserve and destroy the traumatic memory. The text we include in this issue offers a close reading of this work and brings us an array of important references that include more mainstream conceptualizations of archival art by Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida but also do not fail to engage with contemporary scholars, such as Elpida Karaba, Panos Kouros and Rosi Braidotti whose voices are masterfully and critically woven into the analysis. Braidotti's philosophical notion of *becoming-nomad* is used to reflect on Kötting's artistic method of "spillage" - an intermedial approach of combining various media – a sort of bricolage that reactivates the old to create new alternative discourses. The authors embrace this "spillage" and navigate the readers between various philosophical and culture studies issues that engage us in contesting documentary film in the field of memory studies.

We conclude our main thematic section with the text of Mary Smyth, "Methods which enhanced the representation of experiences of recovery and addiction in Animation." This article introduces animation practice as a research method that addresses issues linked to care and alternative discourses by also focusing on surfacing intensely personal experiences that have been many times omitted from the dominant discourses. Through an interdisciplinary practice-based approach, Smyth invites us to position ourselves at the cross-section of social sciences and film studies. She guides us through her method of collecting and working with the narratives of traumatic experiences from the members of the addiction treatment service in Ireland. She then analyzes the recollected stories to critically engage with the issues of representation linked with addiction and recovery. Her work results in the creation of short animated films that become both the method for her academic research and an art-based therapy tool that helps her engage with the community of people who are navigating the journey from addiction to recovery. The text provides a powerful insight into the portrayal of mental health, addiction, and recovery in animation. Smyth positions storytelling

Diffractions // Graduate Journal for the Study of Culture // N°6 - 2nd Series // July 2023 DOI [to be filled out by the editors]

as an indispensable tool to give shape to both traumatic experiences and redemptive journeys of hope. In a sense, storytelling through animation practice is discussed as a collaborative empowerment tool between the artist and the interviewed community that is given voice. The author contributes to the subject by masterfully navigating the narrative identity theory and by shifting focus from trauma towards recovery, demonstrating that redemption narratives should not be omitted. The two short films that are brought up in the text - *The Click* (2021) and *Components of Recovery* (2022) – are deconstructed in the article to showcase an animator's journey who partakes in practice-based research. As such, the piece becomes an important intervention to shape a broader debate and include animation in the academic discourse within the Culture Studies field.

Opening the essay section, the reader will find a central piece for this issue on *Images in Movement*: "Towards a Definition of Elemental Cinema: Matter and Representation Beyond the Ecological Divide" by Margarida Mendes. Mendes is an artist, activist, and researcher, who has dedicated her work to the understanding of water flows and the ways that modes of signification attached to them circulate across different cultural, artistic, and ecological fields. In this essay, Mendes pursues and expands upon a passage from Denise Ferreira da Silva and Arjuna Neuman's film, *Serpent Rain* (2016). Inspired by the question "what becomes of the human if expressed by the elements" (Ferreira da Silva, 2016), Mendes suggests her insights with a backdrop of untimely references that range from cinema in a more classical sense, referencing, for example, Andrey Tarkovsky or Hiroshi Teshigahara, to art, focusing on Navratil's *Under Saturn* (2018); but also from art criticism to ecological philosophy, referencing John Durham Peters' book Marvellous Clouds, for instance, Mendes invites us to consider how we can distance ourselves from the divide between human and nature? One possible way, we learn, is by shifting the focus from a human to a non-human perspective, whereby narratives can be told from the perspective of matter itself. This shift, Mendes argues, has the potential of healing our hierarchical relationship with the realm of the non-human and repositioning human life in ecological terms.

The visual essay, "Red Dog Planet: Images to Ideas and Back Again*"* by Samuel Mountford, that follows, enters in direct contact with the premise put forward by Mendes while showcasing a work in progress where Mountford questions how it is possible to give voice to an animal character without

Diffractions // Graduate Journal for the Study of Culture // N°6 - 2nd Series // July 2023 DOI [to be filled out by the editors]

anthropomorphizing the animal. This essay, however, is also a document about a method of working - a method that is subject to the way images themselves can determine the course of action of a film more than the other way around. It documents Mountford's weblike construction of a narrative where geographic and financial constraints are taken into account and influence the narrative's direction. Bridging references between Australia and Portugal with a slight detour to referencing the Space Race and the landscapes of Mars, Mountford's contribution is pivotal to give sense to what we, as editors, mean by *Images in Movement*: ultimately, not only for the visual arts but also to culture studies as well, it is the images and their related movements that determine a commitment to words, as the author puts it.

Following the two essays, we publish Eduardo Prado Cardoso's insightful case study/review that was inspired by his immersive and collaborative experience at the Documentary Summer School that took place in 2022 in Switzerland. "Trauma, catastrophe, and contemporary conflicts: documentary strategies for the narration of violence" brings Locarno Film Festival closer to us and collects the author's impressions on the state of the documentary. He specifically focuses on the modes of narrating violence that he outlines by analyzing films that speak of contemporary issues of trauma and catastrophe. Prado Cardoso curates his film selection in the essay that critically unites geographies and discourses into a theoretical "mind map" that depicts pressing issues of warfare and ecology, and surfaces the documentary filmmakers´ techniques.

The next contribution is a translation of Jarmo Valcola's article "Discurso documental: reflexões cognitivas e fenomenológicas em questões de rememoração e memória audiovisual" to Portuguese by Eduardo Prado Cardoso. It follows the topic of documentary film's sensory discourses and looks at it through a phenomenological point of view inviting the readers to engage in a cognitive, phenomenological, and perceptual relation with films dealing with subjective personal and collective memories.

We finish our issue by continuing the line of phenomenological approach and with a suggestion to question the materiality of images with our guest artist Carina Corso who takes us into the world of experimental animation with her poetical essay "Quando eu quero saborear um momento, eu fecho os olhos." In it, she not only reminds us of the possibility of engaging with film through our senses and body,

but she challenges the mainstream hegemony of scopic and textual regimes of involvement with the study of moving images. Corso follows such scholars as Laura Marks and Vivian Sobchack to reflect on the haptic visuality and embodied spectatorship applied to the realm of animation. Her essay results from her MA research that was conceived in times of the pandemic that made her question how to speak of body experiences and corporeal memory in times of Covid. She attempts to find her answers through animation practice as research: she uses body as canvas and blood as ink to create short animated films with the use of the *bloodline* technique. With this text, we finalize the issue by zooming in on her captivating practice inviting you to activate your senses and engage with the images in movement through direct contact, through an act of tactile vision.

DOI [to be filled out by the editors]