

Editorial

In her discussion with Chris Clarke in this issue, the artist filmmaker Jasmina Cibic reflects on the generative role of archive research in her filmmaking. Specifically, Cibic is referring to how archival transcripts of diplomatic speeches, cultural papers and letters, particularly relating to the governmental operations of the Balkans and former Yugoslavia during the twentieth century, form the basis for her fictional film stagings, often on a compelling and ambitious scale. Her work on the archive engages numerous practices from architecture to writing and image making, creating and unravelling new connections between them. She is interested in how she might harness the potential of her archival findings to speak counter to the dominant narratives which archives can so often serve, and instead enact a 'feminist, activist rewriting of set histories' by repurposing the documents which she finds. She speaks of how films such as *The Gift* (2021) and *Nada III* use characterization and lavish settings, often within historically resonant spaces, to draw out the geopolitical agendas and attendant rhetoric inscribed in their language. She describes how she approaches her archival making by 'decoding their patriarchal nature and reinscribing a new potentiality within them – by focusing on the erased, lacking, missing and redacted' (236, in this issue). Cibic's deft filmic rewriting and reappropriations thus speak beyond the nationalist political specificities which they expose, raising timely questions not only about the place of culture and its instrumentalization within the constructions of geopolitics and national identity, but also about how filmmakers might counter official histories and their archives, unravelling their reifications to provide a more discursive and dynamic reading of history. The multiple archival sources which Cibic draws upon refract different voices, spaces and experiences – weaving fact with her fictions to create filmic mediations on twentieth-century culture both dazzling and thought-provoking, and with urgent contemporary resonances. As she explains to Clark: 'Together we play with audience expectations, exoticism, political correctness, questions of legitimacy, control, demagoguery and many other relations' (247, in this issue).

It could be argued that Clarke's interview with Cibic is one of a number of the contributions to issue 11.2 – on artists both contemporary and historic – which find timely resonances of both a political and ecological nature in archival re-readings and retrievals. In the 'Scholarlies' section, Jaime Vindel and Alberto Berzosa's examination of militant filmmaking under the repressions of Franco-era Spain delineates a fascinating history of the film collective, the *Cooperativa de Cinema Alternatiu* (Alternative Cinema Cooperative) (CCA), whose films were fired by class consciousness and political conviction, manifesting in the aesthetics of an 'impure' cinema influenced by 'Third Cinema' and determined by the impoverished production conditions endured in their clandestine productions during the 1970s. Vindel and Berzosa's account of CCA's little-known contribution to experimental Spanish cinema history not only makes the case for how political filmmaking culture survived and adapted under repressive conditions, presenting the development of collective and co-operative filmmaking practices as forms of resistance and opposition to political and social oppression. The text also raises a cogent argument for CCA's prescient ecological consciousness in the film *Les Energies* (1979–80), a documentary by the collective which uses experimental techniques of animation and montage to critique fossil fuel consumption and make the case for green energy sources. For contemporary artists intent on how current ecological urgencies might be addressed through the moving image, *Les Energies*'s experimental investigation of the damage wrought by fossil fuel energy generation provides an intriguing example from an earlier era.

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Guest (guest)

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On: Tue, 25 Apr 2023 07:48:14

Through her analysis of Lizzie Borden's film *Regrouping*, Lily Evans-Hill also examines the efficacy of collective working practices, but here from the perspective of the Women's Movement in the cultural milieu of New York in the latter half of the twentieth century. Borden's rarely seen film, withdrawn by the artist and now back in circulation in a new restoration after several decades, is a salutary record of the difficulties and frustrations of the collective and 'small group' culture which remains fundamental to feminist culture, both in its organizational structures and as a core element of its identity. As Evans-Hill explores, *Regrouping* highlights how Borden's attempt to portray a group of feminist artists using a feminist model of collective and consultative filmmaking became marred in conflict. The film raises potent questions about the extent to which collective filmmaking endeavours can ever truly encapsulate a group dynamic, particularly when experimental film and visual arts contexts remain so heavily predicated on a single-authored perspective. As Borden reflected: '[Regrouping] became a treaty or an argument. Instead of it being a documentary, it was something that I had to piece together as an argument for a reason for the group to exist' (225, in this issue). *Regrouping* embodies the conflictual tensions of feminist politics in Borden's fragmentary use of dialogue and image, where the camera is passed between the group and Borden herself. As Evans-Hill makes the case, *Regrouping* remains 'an important feminist document' not only as an historic record of the struggles of realizing feminist collective working practices, but for how the ideals of early feminist group work might be realistically taken forward into a contemporary feminism, which not only acknowledges the difficulties around idealizing the practice and notion of collectivity in feminist culture, but accounts for the intersectional exclusions that it often entails.

If not specifically collective, matters of circulation, particularly within the informal structures of the video community of the 1960s and 1970s, remain prominent in Francois Bovier's discussion of the Swiss video artist Jean Otth, whose work is little seen outside his national context. As Bovier makes the case, Otth was intimately connected to the development of video as a viable medium for art practice within and without the institutional structures of the Swiss artworld. However, Bovier complicates this historiography trajectory by embedding Otth's practice as both video-maker, programmer and educator in the wider networks of the 'videosphere' which extended beyond the visual arts field into other contexts of the medium's use and dissemination in guerrilla and community production. Bovier's engagement with Otth's work echoes Cibic's entreaty to revivify and rewrite the 'set histories' reified by the archive. Like Berzosa, Vindel and Evans-Hill, his focus on Otth provides a generative point of navigation through which to challenge embedded narratives, whether of geopolitics, feminism or video art histories. In addition, scholarly research such as theirs disseminates welcome new knowledge of film and video-makers and works still little-known beyond the archive shelf and national context.

The participants gathered for the roundtable discussion of the moving image programme *ໂລກ(ໂລ)ໂລ (Im)material worlds*, which ran to online audiences between January and March 2022, might seem far removed from these archival excavations. However, as Kitty Anderson, Graiwoot Chulphongsathorn, Emma Dove, Tina Fiske, Philippa Lovatt and David Upton agreed during their discussion: collaboration, as well as environmental geopolitics, were at the heart of their vision for the project. Based between Scotland and the Global South, where the different partners work as academics (Lovatt, Chulphongsathorn), in the independent arts organization CAMPLE LINE (Dove, Fiske) and for moving image agency LUX Scotland (Anderson, Upton), the digital screening platform facilitated a discursive space for artists from across continents to meet, discuss and screen moving image

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works which engaged with the colonial, political and environmental resonances of place. Chulphongsathorn voices the need for a collaborative dynamic in relation to the urgency of the subject when he notes that

the nature of the Anthropocene discussion is inherently interdisciplinary, so academics like myself and Philippa should not monopolise and dictate the conversation. I think that's why we wanted other sectors involved – other moving image organisations, to be a part of the project.

(254, in this issue)

The films in the *ໂສນ(ໂລກ)ສູງ* (*Im*)*material worlds* programme use experimental means to address the geopolitical realities resulting from the conditions of the Anthropocene: 'places, habitats and communities that have been made precarious, their futures uncertain, by institutions and practices rooted in imperialism, its legacies and its corporate and governmental iterations' (252, in this issue). Consisting of paired online screenings and discussions between artists ranging from Alia Syed and Apichatpong Weerasethakul to Nguyễn Trinh Thi, Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa and Maeve Brennan, the fortnightly programme provided a rich forum and points of connection concerning how these urgencies are being addressed by moving image artists working in experimental modes of essay and documentary practice. Whilst these fruitful exchanges were made possible through a digital platform, they also had a real-world iteration as part of the Sands: International Film Festival of St Andrews, enabling the conversation to be continued in person, a reflection of which we were delighted to include through the discussion between artists Lucy Davis and Alia Syed in *MIRAJ* issue 11.1.

This issue's reviews also consider research, on the page and in the gallery, which addresses colonial legacies and Anthropocene precarities, often asking – as Maria Walsh suggests in her review of the 2022 *Berlin Biennale, Still Present!* – for a decentring away from still dominant US–European rhetoric around decolonization towards a more reflective mode of enquiry: something art has the potential to address, as some works in the biennale demonstrated. As Walsh observes:

Art can critique the continuity of coloniality in liberated nation-states, but it has more of a role to play in the decolonisation of the mind, to paraphrase the Kenyan novelist and post-colonial theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. This decolonisation necessitates detachments from dominant power and recoveries of lost worlds at a more imaginary, perhaps unconscious, level.

(275, in this issue)

Walsh's insight plays out elsewhere in the 'Reviews' section, in the liminalities and precarities of moving image as public spectacle which Jane Madsen observes reading Annie dell'Aria's publication *The Moving Image as Public Art: Sidewalk Spectators and Modes of Enchantment*, whilst in Gil Z. Hochberg's close-grained analysis of current Palestinian artists *Becoming Palestine: Toward an Archival Imagination of the Future* Kaelen Wilson-Goldie finds, for example, 'many possible adventurous and imaginative paths out of today's malaise, and daring to include some traces of hope' (292, in this issue). At her exhibition and film work at the Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University, *Barang Barang*, Erika Tan shapes her imaginary around an impossible meeting between four artists separated in historical time and space. Tan's portrait of female cosmopolitanism, or 'cross border agents', complicates the assumed power dynamics of Asian European networks during the twentieth century. Like Cibic, Tan engages the archive as a transformative and affective medium of feminist and affective intent, attuning the biographical facts of the

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artists Georgette Chen, Kim Lim, Gordine and her mother Fay Tan to a speculative turn and mingling their archive with her own familial one. In many ways, this issue was produced through a series of encounters with numerous texts created collaboratively – as can be seen in the interviews, roundtables and co-authorships – a symptom of the increasing desire to find new forms and strategies in a world in which the single voice makes way for multiple, diverse and collective authoring.

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Lucy Reynolds has lectured and published extensively. Her research as writer, artist and curator focuses on questions of the moving image, feminism, political space and collective practice. She edited the anthology *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), co-edited *Artists' Moving Image in Britain since 1989* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019) and co-edits the *Moving Image Review & Art Journal (MIRA)*. She coordinates the Ph.D. programme for the Centre for Research in Education, Art and Media (CREAM) at the University of Westminster and runs the MRES Creative Practice. She was a recipient of the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art mid-career fellowship 2022. As an artist, her ongoing sound work *A Feminist Chorus* has been heard at the Glasgow International Festival, the Wysing Arts Centre, The Grand Action cinema, Paris and Grand Union galleries, Birmingham.

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