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FILE NOTE IV

STUDIO VISIT WITH HELENA GOUVEIA MONTEIRO

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I return to FSAS, this time to the editing suite. My visit is with Helena Gouveia Monteiro, a visual artist and experimental filmmaker whose practice also engages photography, publishing, literature and installation. Originally from Portugal, she studied in Nice and continues to work with international artistic communities. Her next Light Cone Atelier 105 Residency will bring her to Paris, where she will complete post-production on her short film-in-progress, *Purkyně's Dusk*. It is very exciting to be in the editing suite with Gouveia Monteiro, and I am thrilled that she is sharing a rough cut of her film with me. She explains the film and its context. *Purkyně's Dusk* is a Super 8 film, which is colourised in processing and reworked with chemicals, and which also involves digital colour work. This intersection between digital and analogue is a prominent feature of her practice, as is her exploration of alternative procedures in bringing photographs into film and digital modes. She describes the process of making this particular film, revealing that she does almost everything herself, including processing the black-and-white footage. The only task she doesn't do is the colour processing, which takes place in the lab. I immediately get the sense that materials and her engagement with them are the driving force of her practice. She mentions that her work is based on experimentation with the materials and medium, rather than relying on a pre-determined concept or narrative. She also emphasises the relationship between editing and conceptualisation, which is the point at which her projects hit their stride and begin to come into their own as artworks. *Purkyně's Dusk* is based on a theory of colour by Jan Evangelista Purkyně, a 19th-century Czech physiologist who asserts that our perception of colour is dependent on light conditions. Gouveia Monteiro plays off his theory throughout the film, which is filmed at dusk and progresses from the yellow colour of the original footage through to blue light and then to darkness. This progression is achieved through tinting and digital manipulation of the digitised footage. Her edit then emphasises this process of desaturation.

A few elements of the film are immediately striking. Firstly, as a poet with a sharp orientation towards language, I am interested that the film is silent. However, the most intriguing part of that silence is the fact that the two human figures speak to each other throughout (though we cannot hear what is being said). The choice to omit sound heightens awareness of an inside/outside sense in the film, in that the viewer witnesses the human interactions but has no context or understanding of what is happening between the two figures. Equally, and as Gouveia Monteiro points out, the viewer has only a visual insight into the workings of the non-human figures in the film, which takes place in a garden setting. The film is full of events that the viewer is not given full access to, both things that happen between the human figures and things that happen with the flowers, bees, bushes and other figures of nature that feature prominently. Gouveia Monteiro notes that the humans in her films are not cast as characters per se and are not actors, so there is a balance built into the film between human and non-human subjects.

In filming, this equivalence is enacted in her equal attention to both human and natural subjects, as she films both at the same time. By removing the sound, our ability to analyse based on narrative and psychology is also removed, and so the viewer's attention is more keenly focused on colour, gesture and movement in the film. The cuts and the unstable or shifting movement of the camera add to this sensory experience, further unsettling a sense of continuity that might also be associated with narrative and a human urge towards reason and logic. These techniques reinforce an equilibrium between humans and non-humans and, in a similar vein, the closing credits include the names of the plants and flowers that feature centrally in the film, in addition to the names of the human figures. The credits particularly caught my imagination and made me think about the whole film again. In reconsidering the flowers as central figures, one of the most arresting parts of the film comes in the first few minutes, with red geraniums as the focus. For a period of approximately fifteen seconds the geraniums pulse in and out of split seconds of darkness, with the colour of the flowers and the background desaturating each time. She explains that this part draws on the flicker trope in experimental film, again heightening the sensory experience and giving way to feeling rather than reason. The pulsing flowers certainly had that effect on me as a viewer, connecting me to the bodily experience of a heartbeat but also to sight, as the film interjects into and troubles the persistence of vision.

Towards the end of our visit, we talk about some of Gouveia Monteiro's other projects, including her new film *Sweeney*, influenced by the Buile Suibhne myth, and her publishing collective Stereo Editions. I ask her a little bit more about *Sweeney*, as I am interested to learn how her process of making begins and how her projects tend to develop over time. She talks about collecting ideas with photography and film, and she shows me some of the footage she has taken for *Sweeney* – all birds, in a variety of places, filmed sometimes with her phone, sometimes with her camera, resulting in a mix of quality and resolution. We discover that we work in a similar manner, in that we each collect ideas through notes or images, allowing those ideas to sit and permeate over weeks or months until they become realised in more concrete ways and form part of larger ideas or projects. It makes sense to me when she says that the moment of recording is completely distinct from the moment of conceptualisation, which comes through editing, and I agree that each of those acts involves very different types of attention and engagement. Materials are at the forefront of all of Gouveia Monteiro's work, and her publishing venture is no different. Through handmade publications, Stereo Editions demonstrates a notable concern with sensory experience, object and literary form. As I watch, see, hear, and discuss her artworks, I am struck repeatedly by her unique creativity and her ability to bring that so seamlessly and imaginatively across a variety of mediums. She has deliberately and carefully deciphered a process for making that allows her to break open her subjects in truly exciting and unique ways. Gouveia Monteiro is the kind of artist who can turn her hand to anything, and I leave the editing suite enthralled by *Purkyně's Dusk*, eager to see the final cut and the projects that will follow.

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