

# places to play

Practice, Research & Pedagogy

Jyoti Mistry

Artistic Research in and through Cinema  
research group | master's programme  
Netherlands Film Academy

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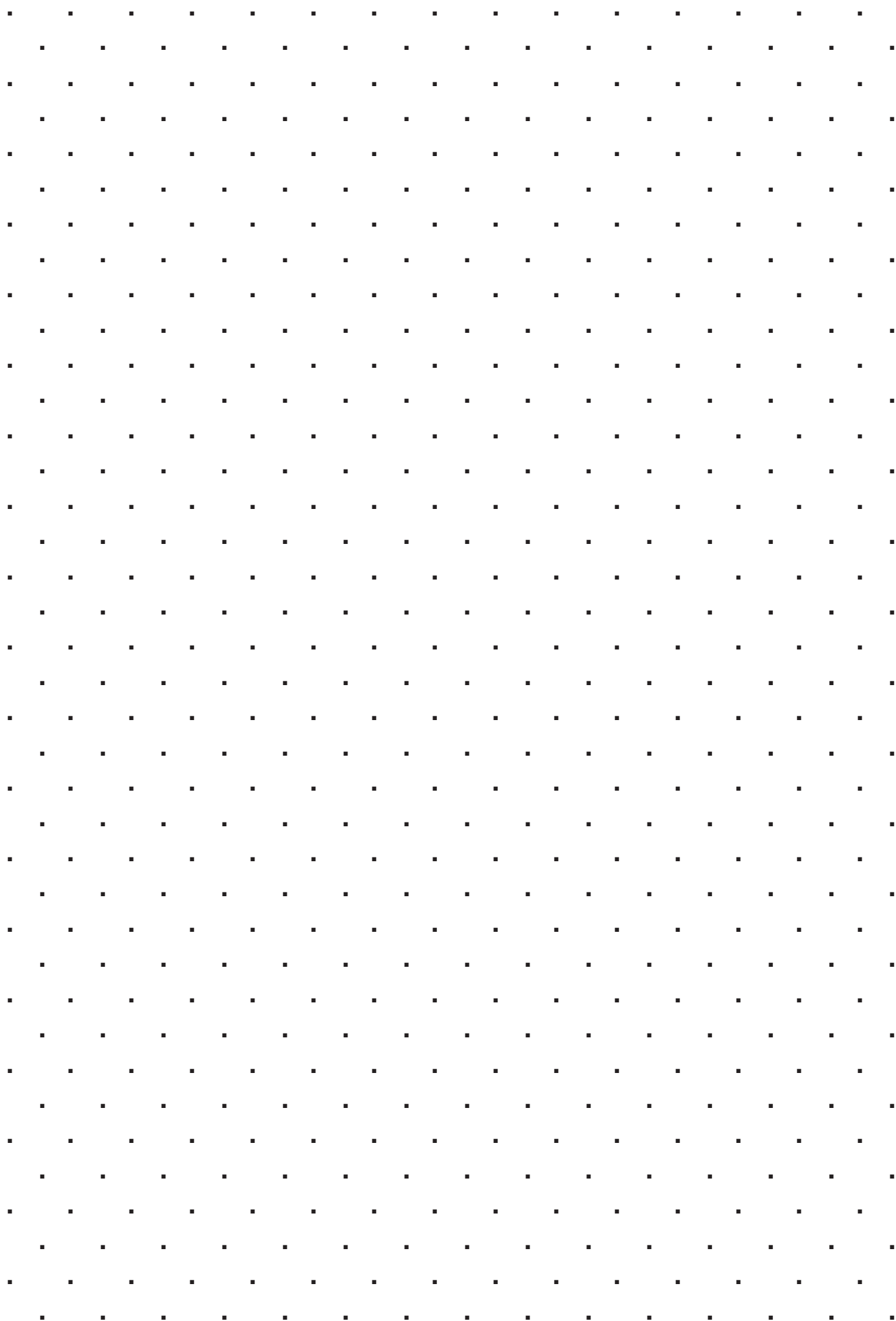
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# Introduction

*Places to Play - Practice, Research, Pedagogy* is Jyoti Mistry's reflection on her time as Artist in Residence at the Netherlands Film Academy in 2016 and 2017.

The author is a South African filmmaker, visual artist and professor at the Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, and she is the third Artist in Residence that the research group at the Film Academy has been fortunate enough to host over the last few years, thanks to the Amsterdam University of the Art's AIR programme.

Like the two resident researchers before her - Israeli documentary filmmaker and lecturer Eyal Sivan and German script consultant Franz Rodenkirchen - Jyoti Mistry was invited to fill a threefold capacity: as a maker doing her own artistic research, as a teacher working with the graduate students of our master's programme Artistic Research in and through Cinema, and as a consultant giving us her input on the timely matter of PhDs in the arts. This publication addresses all three issues, both separately and in relation to one another.

The examination of the tripartite relation between research, pedagogy and practice finds its most reflective form in this publication's centrepiece, Mistry's 'A triad relationship: practice-research-pedagogy' in which she recounts and reflects on the disparate elements of her residency with a focus on her work with our graduate students on colonial film material from the EYE Film Museum's archive.

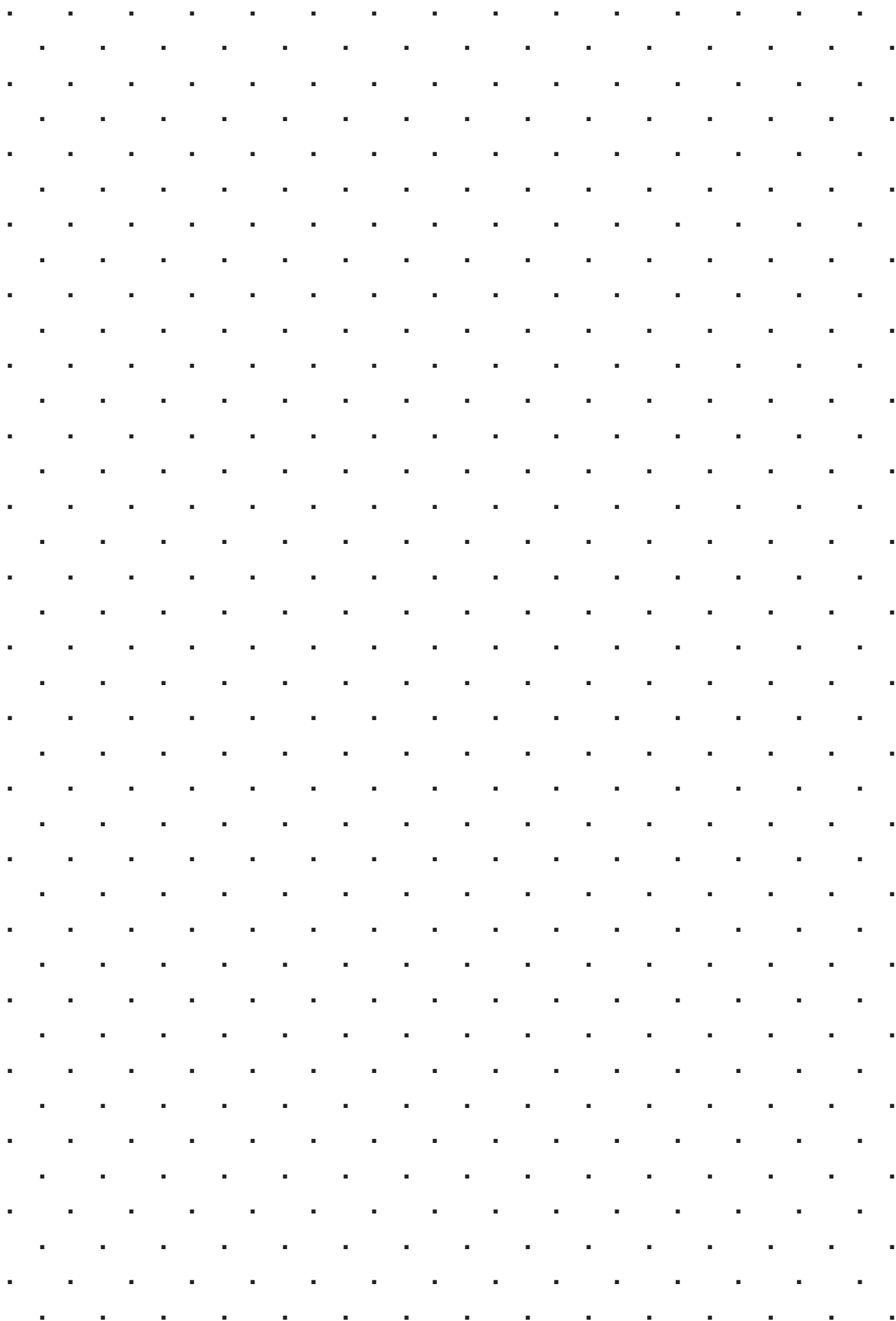
As a lead-up to the main piece Mistry has included excerpts from the 'conversation' that she and I have been and are still having about all the issues at play in artistic research and its institutional contexts, particularly within the world of film and film education.

Where the conversation takes its cue from 'research' and the main piece from 'pedagogy', the third section of this publication, titled 'When I grow up I want to be a black man', takes 'practice' as its starting point, and contextualizes the eponymous cinematic installation that Mistry produced as part of the residency for exhibition at the EYE Film Museum.

Artistic research, certainly as we define it in our research group and master's programme, is an essentially open-ended trajectory in which questions are preferred over answers, and process is preferred over product. It is a definition reflected in the form and content of this publication, the first in what we hope will be series on artistic research in and through cinema. It is a note book; a work book. Because artistic research is always, fundamentally, a work in progress.

I wish you an enjoyable and illuminating read.

Mieke Bernink  
Head of research and master's programme  
Artistic Research in and through Cinema  
Netherlands Film Academy



# A conversation

**Mieke Bernink and Jyoti Mistry explore film's potential as an instrument and medium for artistic research, the position of this form of research in art schools and universities and its increasing significance in film programmes. They also reflect on how film schools might embrace the ethos of artistic research to diversify pedagogic approaches and augment ideas of film practice and its role and function in advancing the research agenda in artistic and creative practices, particularly with respect to the significance of PhDs in artistic disciplines.**

**Mieke Bernink:** When we started putting together our master's programme 'artistic research in and through cinema', it was absolutely clear to us that all the mentors, teachers or lecturers would need to be practitioners – and more specifically that their work and practice should be clearly research-driven (even if they themselves might not have described it as such). Just like the students for whom we developed this course, our 'teaching staff' would be artistic researchers: filmmakers and artists who understand their practice as an open-ended process in which thinking and making are one. We see these practitioners as being able to conceptualize the subjectivity underlying their drive and their choice of questions, method, content and form. So despite being a 'research master', none of our fellow travellers helping to develop the programme are academics or film theorists in the traditional academic sense. They are all, first and foremost, artists.

**MB:** When we're rethinking pedagogy I feel it's important to stress that for us the notion of artistic research applies not only to individual participants, mentors and lecturers, but also to the programme as a whole. We see the entire programme as a research space – or lab – and we understand pedagogy from that same perspective. Artistic research is not just a tool but a mentality or, better, an attitude or ethos. It means context and pedagogical approaches are then geared towards creating a setting, a playground, in which a process can unfold – for the 'students' (actually we prefer to call them 'artistic researchers') and for everyone else involved. Another way of describing it would be to say that the programme creates 'conditions of possibility' for all concerned. And that includes the artists in residence, whom we invite to temporarily join the programme and whom, like you, have posed questions in and through their own work, which has informed the methodologies that students have been exposed to.

**Jyoti Mistry:** I was very excited to get the invitation to be an artist in residence at the Netherlands Film Academy, and I was really intrigued. Ever since I heard your presentation where you described the approach of this particular master's programme I was keen to have the chance and the context to rethink film pedagogy. One of the central issues in teaching film is how different filmmakers' personal practices inform approaches to teaching and how experience shapes the way we interrogate film as a mode of critical enquiry. In some ways critical enquiry can be a way of suggesting that pedagogy is informed by the experiences and practices of filmmakers. In that sense the term 'artist' is interesting in the context of film schools because historically film schools tend to proudly celebrate their former students who have made commercially successful or award-winning films. So for me it's a radical and uniquely admirable endeavour to have a film programme where film is used as a research tool. And it's also a way of recognising the multiple ways in which film practices happen rather than exclusively those that have found their way into the commercial or historical canon.

**JM:** As someone with my own artistic practice who has been primarily involved in teaching, I see incredible value and opportunity in a context where you can invite students into your own practice. It's not something you come across very often. The framework for my research was consideration of the EYE Film Museum's archive from the perspective of a South African of Indian descent looking at the Dutch colonial past. More specifically, I wanted to bring the students into my 'subjectivity', which was informed by the research questions I posed when engaging with the historical images. This also exposed students to some of my research approaches and methods. The film archive became a tool for confronting and honing my own questions surrounding identity and reimagined histories, and from there the students used it as a starting point for their own research. Bringing the students into my research process gave me insights into my own work. In some ways it fostered my own further critical self-reflection, because having to convey concepts to students means articulating ideas that might otherwise seem intuitive. In that sense teaching is not simply an act of disseminating knowledge, because – especially at post-graduate level – it's a way of revealing how knowledge comes to be shaped through a series of interrogative processes.

**MB:** I see this approach as a process-driven pedagogy which is distancing itself from the conventional, hierarchical, goal-driven idea of teaching as a form of one-way knowledge transfer from teacher to students. It naturally favours Rancière's 'equality of intelligences', and qualities such as open-endedness, inter- or non-disciplinarity, and collaboration. It raises questions and yet more questions and, perhaps most importantly, it adopts the artistic or cinematic practice and its conceptual language as its starting point, its method and its temporary outcome. What's crucial to this, and you referred to it already, is the notion of 'subjectivity', which is central to the way we here think about artistic research. In fact subjectivity is the focus of the very first semester and keeps playing an important role thereafter. As well as subjectivity being about understanding the determinants of your complicated or multifaceted identity - social, political, economic, psychological, ethnic, geographic, institutional, disciplinary - and how that influences your work and interests, it's also - and ultimately more importantly - about the position you take with respect to those determinants and the need to take responsibility for that position.

**JM:** When we start addressing subjectivity, not simply as an 'indulgent I' [sic] but as part of the visible, transparent expression and construction of the process, then I think we are getting to the nub of what the ethos of artistic research implies. What's key to this approach is being accountable and responsible to one's artistic practice as research because this helps steer clear of the out-dated notion that artists are ordained with some special gift. And it makes two points very apparent. Firstly it lays bare the processes of creating or making, and secondly it belies the archaic idea of 'the genius of the artist' or the 'artist as connoisseur'. We want artists to be searchers, researchers of knowledge, experimenters with ideas and conduits of knowledge production.

To take up your point about process and not being driven exclusively by outcome: that's where the fundamental potential of artistic research lies, regardless of whether it's in film or in fine arts - the latter being where ideas around artistic research have gained most traction. Artistic research is positioned as not being discipline-specific. As a mentality rather than a discipline, it draws from multiple disciplines. It's an ethos that invites epistemic disobedience and challenges the hierarchical transfer of knowledge through an insistence on open dialogue and questioning. It's a process that encourages epistemic instability, which by definition implies that the outcomes are unpredictable.

Artistic research also celebrates collaborative, participatory approaches. This challenges the idea of the director as *auteur*, with its analogue in the fine arts to artist-connoisseurs. It also challenges the idea of 'product', the single end-point or outcome. Your observation about using film language or cinematic practice as the starting point for the master's programme is crucial, because cinema and cinema studies have always privileged the content and product, and till now there's been scant attention for the syntax of cinematic practice. In short, we've not yet seen sufficient evolution of film analysis through the language of film itself. What I have in mind is filmmaking's potential as a research tool; as a mode of research-thinking and research-expression that constitutes film's equivalent to the 'linguistic turn' (from Rorty to De Saussure and the implications of what followed in language and its relationship with philosophy).



**MB:** That's why it's crucial, I think, to flesh out a new form of research in film schools. We need to develop artistic research 'in and through' film, and to understand how it distinguishes itself from technological research in film, from academic film research and from artistic research in other disciplines. In fact we should put the fact that the world of filmmaking has been so self-enclosed to our advantage. The language of film - literally the terminology that is used, but also the technical practices these terms relate to - have developed more or less in isolation. It's like some sort of secret code that non-practitioners outside the discipline simply cannot fully grasp. Have a filmmaker and a film theorist watch the same film and comment on it and you'd think they'd seen two completely different films: that's one of the reasons there's such an enormous gulf between them. It might help here to look at the position traditionally occupied by film schools. Our master's programme has been developed and works within the context of a film school. Film schools, particularly the older ones - ours included - were originally conceived as places for training future professionals in the film industry. So they were neither art academies - with their long history of combining practice training with theoretical and art historical reflection - nor part of an academic or university setting. So for a long time film schools were almost oblivious to the development, from the sixties and seventies onwards, of 'film studies'.

**MB:** I see your point, and yet, or maybe precisely because of this institutionally driven and ideological 'division of labour', film schools do remain focussed primarily on professional skills; on the 'how' rather than the 'why'. However subtle and sophisticated this professional training of the how has become (because film schools have realized that with the democratisation of the means of filmmaking, their focus should be even more on the art of storytelling than on technical training) film schools have been slow to consider the potential value of research and research programmes in their education. Of course the film industry is extremely research-driven when it comes to technology and film schools do their best to keep up with all the latest developments in that area. But there's a widespread, perfectly understandable and even well-grounded fear that the creation of a focus on research in film schools could lead to the 'academisation' of film practices and film language - and that's something, I think, that we should try and avoid at any cost.

**JM:** I think film schools were aware of the increasing visibility of film studies programmes but actually prided themselves on this separation. It's a valuable distinction for an institution to separate 'doing' from 'thinking' - in much the same way as art schools and art students in studio programmes are distinguished from those involved in history of arts and, more recently, curatorial studies. The separation between doing and thinking served multiple functions. It allowed artists or the act of making to be addressed as a form of expression rather than a form of knowledge, so it could then be interpreted by the thinkers: the art historians and film theorists. It also legitimatised the role of art and film scholarship that had to sit alongside literary studies or in humanities programmes in universities.

**JM:** This is an important point about institutional positioning and what its implications are for the recognition of how film can be used, not simply as a mode of expression but as a language and instrument of research. Film is not just the material object or the content: it's a language with a grammar (or multiple grammars) available for the expression of research. In other words, when film is recognised as having the capacity for knowledge production, it becomes competitive with other disciplines in universities. And although the Netherlands Film Academy is of course a film school and not an academic institution, this does have implications, primarily for how research funding is described and allocated. It has implications for the canonised disciplines of film and cinema studies and further requires that art schools that teach film as a medium rethink the use and content of the medium. It has implications for how we make faculty appointments in departments. In a way it also creates a professional divide within film schools itself, between those who have in-depth knowledge and experience of the craft of filmmaking - which remains important for film schools - and researchers who use film language primarily for research output. But increasingly it is necessary to recognise that the role of film practitioners need not exclude the role of researcher - and vice versa. In research the focus is on the syntax and languages of film being interrogated, but in my opinion the craft of filmmaking is never absent - the research is served by the craft component, and film is the language through which the research is expressed.

**MB:** I'm not sure I fully agree with the distinction you seem to make here between craft and research. For one thing there's an awful lot of knowledge and thought in craft - although that knowledge may be tacit rather than discursive - and I also think that the goal or effect of 'artistic research' should not be only 'research output' or 'research expression'. The way I see it, it's precisely because of doing the research 'in and through cinema' - meaning 'starting from the practice of cinema' and using that practice as the means of research - that artistic research is also about the 'innovation' of the language of film itself. To put it another way: our assumption on the programme, I think, is that artistic research in the end also makes for better art - art that is more inventive, more daring, more complex.

**MB:** The discussion of PhDs in the arts is a relatively recent one at Amsterdam University of the Arts, which our Film Academy is part of. I'm personally not the greatest advocate of PhDs in the arts, and even less so where it concerns film. If you'd allow me to make a bold and perhaps slightly unfair claim: 'Art doesn't need academia; academia needs art'. The academic field (particularly the humanities) needs practitioners because it is running out of legitimacy and output. Those who so desperately want art and particularly artistic research to be taken seriously by the academic institution believe academia to be the apex of knowledge production and want to share in its status. But is the university still where 'it' (research) is really happening? And why should artistic research comply with the rigid methods of academia? Isn't art a form of knowledge production in itself? And one that can also generate knowledge beyond itself? The kind of fundamental yet subjective research projects some of our students have developed as part of the course or afterwards not only lead to interesting or beautiful films or art projects but also provide knowledge that potentially has relevance outside the realm of the arts, for example in the fields of anthropology, sociology or even psychiatry. But even if we were to support the idea of PhD programmes in the arts, the idea that PhDs should require an exegesis of the artist's work or method makes very little sense to me - let alone that it should be done in writing.

**JM:** The assumption that artistic research makes for better art is a useful provocation. But for me the word 'better' always prompts the question: For whom? For whom is it better? In mainstream, narrative cinema 'better' means 'better artistry'; the enhancement of the technical aspects of filmmaking; the ability to make the realism or the narrative world of the film more authentic through technical and craft elements of the medium; the enhancement of 'special effects'. Having said that, though, I know that's not what you were referring to, because 'better art' in the context of research and academic institutions is all about how to use the resources in film courses to advance innovation, daring, and complexity in filmmaking - in the film language itself. I think the word 'better' is also qualitative and perhaps that is my concern with it. Again Rancière might be useful here. In his work on politics and aesthetics he has a way of describing critical art as having the capacity to 'produce a new perception of the world' which leads to transformation. We might share this sentiment as the possibility for imagining the potential of 'better' as more critically engaged. With this in mind, how should we go about advancing knowledge in filmmaking research as a legitimate form of academic enquiry through postgraduate programmes in universities? If a filmmaker discovers that they are interested in narrative film, but for example want to use films to 'write', to critique ideologies, politics, experiences of war and genocide, or to challenge and alter racial and gender stereotypes, then this requires a much more rigorous engagement with the medium. This is where the PhD in creative arts and its relation to artistic research is really significant, because it is the ideal institutional research space for advancing the agenda of using film as a research tool, as a 'film stylo', film as a pen. But of course this raises other debates taking place within creative arts PhD programmes, like the one surrounding the function or role of writing, and by extension the 'value' or role of the exegesis, the written component that accompanies the filmic expression of the research.

**JM:** I absolutely agree with you, but with a subtle caveat that perhaps reveals differences between, or multiple interpretations of, the function or definition of the exegesis. My questions are these: What function does the exegesis serve in relation to the work, and what is its role in the broader structure of the degree programme? Again this is about institutional frameworks and how the degree is measured or evaluated. I agree that if the function of the exegesis is simply to explain process, to expound on the work and provide the hermeneutic reading of the work, then the use of the exegesis in our context is problematic because it demands that the student or researcher be maker and interpreter simultaneously. It is a dangerous position that takes us back to the idea of the 'truthful' or ultimate interpretation residing with the intention of the author. Where does that leave us with regard to Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author*, and the act of deconstruction that enables and promotes multiple readings of the text based on context? It seems to me that the role of the exegesis in this narrow understanding - in the sense of having to 'explain' the creative work or artistic practice - is one that is institutionally expedient.

The way I see it, the danger of 'measuring' and assessing an artwork (in this case a 'film work') is that doing so may reduce it to an object of spectatorship. There's a danger that examiners will assess the work on the basis of whether they like it or not; in other words their aesthetic preferences or 'taste.' So the assessment should not be about opinion or the type of film that an examiner might favour (or disfavour) but about really engaging with the research conceit or research premise. In some ways the exegesis as an academic tool seems to be tied up with institutional qualification and assessment criteria that relieve examiners of the responsibility to decode the research (the syntactical relationship to the research semantics), and places that responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the student. So in this narrow definition the exegesis provides context and meaning to enable the 'non-specialist' or 'outsider' examiner to 'understand' the work in light of disciplinary differences and disciplinary specificities. I'm interested however in there being another role for the exegesis, through which it reveals something of the work that is not inherent in the work itself. An example might be an exegesis that creates an example vehicle through which the research can be accessed, or provides another position, even one that contradicts what might have been explored in the film. But having said this I fully appreciate your questioning of the necessity of an exegesis and more specifically a written one. Why have a written text explain a 'text' that exists already in another 'linguistic' form: film. You and I consider film to be a language, and if that's the case then what function does the written word have in this context? Would a mathematician require an exegesis of a mathematical proof that is already in the very language that accounts for the research or outcome?

**MB:** Exactly! There's also something almost anachronistic in demanding filmmakers and visual artists that they write. In an era that's predominantly audio-visual this demand seems not just out-dated but also unproductive - it's contrary to the strength of the artists, which is in the field of thinking through images and sounds. And sure, it's good that practice-led or practice-based PhD programmes in the arts allow an artwork to count towards the coveted doctorate (especially if the university finances the project, which, by the way, they rarely do!) but why can't the artwork be enough, in and of itself? The demand for an exegesis places an unnecessary restriction on artistic research as production of knowledge.

**MB:** That's a very important concern I have. Artistic research is slowly becoming more and more institutionalized, mimicking the forms of conferences, peer reviewed journals and so on, all in an effort to be taken seriously, particularly by the academic community (and, or so people hope, share in its funding). As you may have gathered I have my doubts, because as I said before, in our master's programme, artistic research is viewed less as a discipline than as an attitude. It is, or should really be, process driven. What I mean is that artistic research should be developing itself without there being a pre-determined goal (either in terms of content or form). In fact the subject of the artistic research could be undefined for a long time and only reveal itself by the end of the process. That's why I'm also reluctant in fact to define 'artistic research' as such; it comes into being by being practiced, every time anew. And by extension, its methodology should also be un-prescribed. To paraphrase a text that appears in Godard's *Vent D'est*, 'There's no just image, there's just an image': there's no just method, there's just a method. And method is necessarily subjective. What matters in artistic research is that the researcher develops his or her own method in relation to what he or she is working on. This makes artistic research essentially un-disciplinary - not just trans-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary.

And the way you worked is an excellent example of this: you had a fascinating and ingenious approach to introducing the students to the notion of confrontation. Your project with them, which culminated in the *Archive as a Place to Play* exhibition, which was predicated on your idea that it's possible to conduct research through forms of confrontation. One can take one's research question or topic and confront it with - or 'rub' it against - anything: any practice, any situation, any set of images or sounds, and so on. So once you had chosen to work on the EYE Film Institute's colonial archive you invited all the students to take the archive material and all it stands for and rub it up against their research question, irrespective of whether the student's own research question had anything to do with colonialism, found footage, archiving, silent cinema or race for instance. Your stated aim was that the confrontation would lead not only to a 'work' (the exhibition) but more importantly to a better understanding or redefinition of their individual research topics and project ideas.

**MB:** In your essay you describe the role of the agglutinative mode and material thinking but you also exemplify four stages in process and method, with the last one being reflection, afterwards - reflection on the way the workshop or project helped move forward the students' understanding of their own research topic.

**JM:** It is not a matter of institutional frameworks with rigid assessment criteria and research funding which is attached to research output in conflict with the ethos of artistic research itself?

**JM:** I like the idea that the observations we make, whether in everyday life or about art or texts, are inextricably connected to one's own preoccupations or reference points in the world. One example is how, for some viewers, gender or race is a driver in any analysis. Identity and experience shape how texts are interpreted and even if these components are actually absent, we introduce them to find our own self or experience or worldview reflected in the material. Take how Daniel Danato's film looked at the way homoerotic desire was expressed in colonial material, and the films by Emilio Reyes-Bassail or Louis Hothothot confronted the place of black subjectivity or colonised histories and subjectivities through colonial imagery that was so consciously documenting the coloniser's experiences. The students' enquiries make the absent present in the material, releasing it from the original intentions of the documenter or filmmaker. This brings me to this idea of the agglutinative mode and material thinking as processes, or methods. They allow us to better understand our questions and to shape what we have to say about the topic - and, equally important, how we say it.

**MB:** Is there actually a difference between making and teaching? Or to put it differently: can one think about making and teaching as practices that stem from the same source? And, if so, might that source be one's subjectivity? If we consider an artistic research programme to be a research space for all those involved – for both the individuals and the group or collective – then the attitude underlying it also enters the 'classroom' – the classroom as a space for collective practice and collective thought where the teacher is as much a participant as the students. That's what I saw happening, from the outside, in your workshop. You had a set framework for the workshop, of course, but you went into the process not just with an open mind, but with an eagerness to learn, be challenged and be inspired yourself. You weren't just 'doing your thing'; you invested your subjectivity. You were being a maker while you were teaching and vice versa; you as a practitioner are also always a teacher when you're making.

**JM:** That's right, although it must be said that reflection is enmeshed in various ways in every stage of the process. I use the word 'afterwards' to imply a distancing that is different in a critical, corporeal and processual sense, one that poses a set of observations that invites the students to address questions which are not about 'problem solving' relating to the making of work or refining the research question. It's an opportunity to pose something wholly new once you're removed from the work itself. Unfortunately there wasn't enough time to focus on this stage extensively: in my experience of teaching it can be a tough task in the final stage of the process to get students to step away from what they have done and engage in critical self-reflection, especially given the tough demands we are already placing on their time. It's comes with experience; it develops over time when working with collaborators. In my own practice working on projects – especially films that are more invested in conceptual enquires – the discussions that take place enable one to systemically step back to address how others are interpreting and requesting clarification, exemplification, elucidation. It forces you, as a practitioner, to reassess your own thinking. And as teachers we need to satisfy the sometimes institutional demands for the feedback and assessment to ensure that topics, themes, methods and the exposure to the creative experience is seen as relevant to the students' areas of interest and enquiry. While certain aspects of this type of assessment are applicable to undergraduate studies, my key area of interest remains in the relationship between research, practice and pedagogy and the implications for postgraduate master's students and PhD candidates.

**JM:** I appreciate your observations, because I'm very much interested in collapsing the hierarchy that places the 'teacher' in the position of 'knower' in this sort of context. What you actually are is a practitioner facilitating an investigation with the students/researchers. In this sense when the environment for artistic research is made conducive for questioning, enquiry and encouraging detours in the research, it builds the trust you need to support 'failure' as a necessary step in experimentation and learning. And there is learning to be had for everyone involved, not just the students. I've found that my practice has become increasingly rigorous because as well as exploring my own work I'm involved in several other projects – the students' projects and their research questions also grow my experience. Like you said, artistic research is an attitude and I think one has to embrace it as embodied in the ethos one sets in the classroom, an ethos in which pedagogy is part of the practice and practice continuously informs ways of producing knowledge.

research pedagogy  
practice

practice research  
pedagogy

practice  
research  
pedagogy

\* This relates to the broad framework proposed in the introduction:

– **Institutional context**

- (a) Invites consideration to how institutions view research and practice.
- (b) Contrast between orthodox definitions of research and artistic research.

– **Pedagogy**

- (a) Vocation/professional specialisation
- (b) Artistic research approach that invites greater inquiry

– **Process and practice rather than only outcome (product) driven.**



# A TRIAD RELATIONSHIP: practice – research – pedagogy

## Introduction

Being invited to be an artist in residence prompted me to reflect on what is it to be an artist, particularly in relation to film-making. I further wondered whether it was even appropriate for me to be labelled as an 'artist' at all. Those involved in making films use different labels in different contexts to mobilise the value attached to these labels. The word 'artist' allows one to navigate the world of museums and galleries with films which are positioned as art – as opposed to films made for commercial purposes. While I have made films that have exhibited in a variety of contexts, I have spent a larger part of my career teaching film practice, film history and film theory, and this residency offered me the opportunity to explore a number of ideas relating to artistic research and creative practice. Most of the literature on artistic research originates from fine arts disciplines and derives from an interrogation of the role of arts schools – a role that is historically quite distinct from that of film schools. I will address this subject later in some detail.

I saw this residency as an opportunity to enter a new environment to experiment with ways in which my being a filmmaker informs my teaching practice. Research in more orthodox university settings is currently being challenged through artistic research. Knowledge production is no longer being exclusively expressed in prescriptive forms that are text-based or published texts. Instead they may take the form of exhibitions, installations, material objects and other linguistic paradigms, in this case film.

While one's own artistic practice is a matter of personal exploration and experience gained through projects and over time (James Elkins ably explores this topic in *Artists with PhD's*), I also embrace the ideas put forward by Jacques Rancière in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Combining my experience as practitioner, garnered over time and through numerous disparate projects, I would describe my role as a facilitator of processes in which students are encouraged to explore and experiment in the 'teaching-learning' institution. This contrasts with the notion of the teacher as 'superior' or 'knower'. In general my approach allows processes to unfold, and in this specific context it was enhanced by the students' interests and the research questions posed by the students themselves.

**'In all cases it is a question of observing, comparing, and combining, of making and noticing how one has done it.'**

**(Rancière, 1981, 36)**

## Paths of inquiry:\*

**Three converging and diverging paths:  
practice, research and pedagogy**

The concepts of practice, research and pedagogy sit well with one another and seem to be an obvious triad. The intertwining, co-dependant relationship might seem so self-evident that it requires no further interrogation. Perhaps it is this apparent simplicity that is so beguiling: the trick lies in the assumption that practice is a product of research and that a set of procedures can be used to teach practices. These pedagogic strategies are then presented in research methodologies, some of which become canonised over time. This is, however, a very generalised, reductive way of considering a relationship that is in fact porous. When the researcher in the process of making is also a practitioner and when pedagogy clarifies both research and practice, the cyclic relationship becomes latticed and its intertwining is more apparent. This relationship between research, practice and pedagogy could be radically transformed by practitioners getting involved in teaching and exposing their practice processes and experience.

The reasons for caution, however, are two-fold. Firstly, the relationship between research, practice and pedagogy is neither successive nor does it consist of tidily compartmentalised procedures, and secondly we cannot assume that there is shared understanding of what constitutes practice and/or research and its further implications for pedagogy. Additionally, it is necessary to dissuade the conceit (or premise) that all practice can be conceived as systemic forms of pedagogy which always operate from a position of stability of knowledge. I hope to demonstrate here that the act of questioning the stability of knowledge paradigms lies at the heart of artistic research. Moreover, there is political value in challenging canonised knowledge systems through artistic research since to do so gives space for marginal voices to be expressed and for alternative forms of experience to emerge. In this process, artistic research becomes a form of knowledge production.

The following set of reflections, observations and considerations examines the connectedness between practice, research and pedagogy, a productive mesh explored through the experience of an exhibition facilitated through my residency at the Netherlands Film Academy (NFA).

There are many divergent positions on the function of the exegesis in artistic research. One of them proposes that artists write about their work (a commentary) while Bolt (2007) offers something of an alternative.

Exegesis: In artistic research 'written commentary' is described less in terms of an explanation of the creative work; in fact the creative work has the ability to produce an eloquence of thought inherently in the form of the artistic work. The role then, of the complimentary writing is to reveal or expose something of the work that is not present in the form of the artwork.



## AIR exhibition with master's students at the EYE: Archive as a Place to Play

The culmination of my initial period as artist in residence at the NFA was *Archive as a Place to Play*, the exhibition I curated at the EYE Film Museum in Amsterdam in May 2016. My central interest in the process was that it allowed me to mobilise my position as a practitioner concerned with film archives being a resource for reimagining histories, narratives and experiences, letting me bring my practice to the fore as part of the process with the students, while using my research objectives with the archive to enable the students' own research interests.

Initiated by EYE Research Lab, this research project brought together ten NFA Master of Film students. Their first action was to conduct collaborative research of the archival material. They then produced ten discrete film-related projects, focusing on the same source material but reframing the material in their own way. Their task was to consider the material using questions guided by their own research inquiries. I provided some methodological considerations as well as the parameters of the exhibition framework. In this sense my role was curator and facilitator.

As a film practitioner and as a scholar interested in the ideas that inform film research, film practice and artistic research, my interest in this project was to investigate how practice informs pedagogies in artistic research.

I am committed to addressing how artistic research informs practice methodologies and considering its direct and significant impact on revitalising pedagogic strategies, and to this end I will be offering some very broad observations about the nexuses linking the three positions of research, practice and pedagogy. This will create a fertile base for challenging prescriptive modes of film pedagogies and bringing to the fore the increasing significance of process in knowledge production in film practices.

The field of artistic research has gained currency and traction as an interrogative process in visual arts, choreography, dance and theatre, as testified to by the writings of James Elkins, Sarat Maharaj, Mick Wilson and Paul Carter. Artistic research has encouraged and enabled interdisciplinarity across many arts practices, but its uptake in film practice has been relatively slow and comparatively recent.

In my experience, interest in artistic research in film is greatest in institutions that are investigating film as a research tool. Participants in the NFA master's programme have a variety of backgrounds in film and in other arts. Film programmes at some other art schools (e.g. Valand Academy at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden and the Institute of Artistic Research at Konrad Wolf Film School in Babelsberg, Germany) consider film as a medium for expressing content but also recognise film as a distinct and significant language. In other words, it is possible to use film language to surpass the narrow understanding of film as simply a

representational form. More than exclusively a medium for telling stories, film is a language with its own grammar and syntax that can be used analytically and that can have a discursive function. Film language used in creative research is fundamental to the production of knowledge that requires no further formal exegesis in text-based form.

The separation of filmmaking practice and film scholarship is largely the result of the historical canonising of cinema/film studies, that is described as the 'research or analytical arm' of film history and film theory. Arguably, this privileges content over form. In many respects this separation between the doers and makers, on the one hand and the historians, theorists and scholars, on the other, perpetuates the myth of artists/practitioners who do not have to address process or content and are able to leave it to the critics and scholars to decipher intention or meaning. Writing thus provides a hermeneutic function of film practices and forms – theorists firmly entrenched in scholarship but safely removed from the making. When practitioners are invited to engage their practice it generally takes a descriptive form (at times with a prescriptive or didactic function) rather than an analytical form. Here I have in mind the structure of master classes with film professionals (for example directors, cinematographers, editors) who recount descriptively the process of creating a project or 'how it should be done' based on their experiences. The didactic function is akin to what in arts schools is described in studio practice and the role of critiques. The experience of the 'teacher or mentor' is also the primary source for the feedback. It is interesting to observe that film festivals have also increasingly become a platform for film pedagogies through master classes and workshops and these often take the form of descriptive, anecdotal structures that recount personal processes in the professional experience of filmmaking.

In the cases where cinema/film studies have interrogated form as the primary source for the production of meaning it has been circumscribed by the framework of avant garde tradition and experimental practices. This has tended to reaffirm the historical divide between artistic and commercial filmmaking. Experimental art film practices are championed by museums and galleries and more comfortably find their way into the fine arts discourse. To clarify: I use the term 'art film' to describe a form and practice derived from avant garde and experimental filmmaking; increasingly these forms are deemed to be in the purview of museums, galleries and should not be conflated with art house cinema, for example.

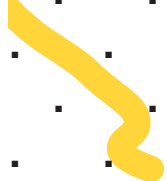
While it is true that the art world is driven by its own commercial imperatives, the crude separation of filmmaking in terms of 'artistic' or 'commercial' does little to expose the potential of film language as a research tool. Film, whether as an artistic or

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\*

Ten international students from diverse national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds with different undergraduate training (not all with film production backgrounds).

The master's students have experience in their disciplinary background but enter the programme with an initial research question or inquiry framework. The project also drew from this research starting point.

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The pedagogic context was framed by my own research interest in colonial archives, and the students were brought into this frame.

A thick yellow arrow pointing from the text block above to the text block below.

How might they appropriate this as a starting point and find a way to enable their own research questions?

commercial product, is in part the result of the vocational or professional film production priorities that have informed how curriculum and pedagogies are determined in film schools. The significance that film schools historically place on vocational training or the professionalisation of filmmaking crafts is a core attendant to the economic 'feeding' or supply to local and global film production industries inclusive of television and other broadcast platforms.

These are some of the underlying concerns that I was grappling with when I took the opportunity to become the artist in residence at the Netherlands Film Academy. In the first part of the residency, from January to May 2016, I had the opportunity to explore methodologies and processes with the master's students. This culminated in the *Archive as a Place to Play* exhibition. In the second part, from July 2016 to July 2017, the experiences with the students informed my own project titled *When I Grow up I Want to be a Black Man*.

Using the same archive material as the students, but applying my own research questions and artistic concerns to it, I both drew from their observations and augmented it with my own aesthetic preoccupations. What was fundamental to the collaborative process (both between myself and the students and between the students themselves) was how it exposed and privileged processes and methodologies, enabling students to arrive at forms of knowledge production and 'meaning-making' with filmic images that were not confined to the delimits of the meaning intended for production or their historical context.

## Research questions\* and pedagogic strategies

The proposal for my own creative project for the second phase of my residency, was to examine similar historical images collected from the former Dutch colonies. Rather than viewing the film archive simply as evidence of colonial exploitation, as documents of oppression and the colonial gaze on the Other, I am invested in and concerned with unearthing and exploring stories that reveal the subjectivities of the filmmaker and the subjectivities of the Other.

The exhibition with the students revealed and made more visible the potential of the archive, now freed from the prescripts of the filmmaker's historical intentions. Now, a century later, it is possible to read images which tell narratives that undo the socio-political, historical intention (the original meta-narrative) of the images and expose experiences previously excluded from the hegemonic centre.

The question is this: Can the archive created by colonial hegemonies be subverted to expose and reveal the experiences of the Other? Can the experiences of those who are not centre-frame be set centre-frame so that their histories, experiences and subjectivities in the colonial past are made visible? Can previously marginal figures (for example the black subjects who have remained voiceless) come to occupy a more central place in the narrative? This repositioning of the points of view in a history of the victims as well as the victors functions as a review and revision of the historical narrative, to generate what in South Africa is increasingly known as 'public histories'. This is history as told from the ground up, and it relies on the confluence of research questions that the filmmaker poses on the archive and a re-examination of the archive itself. The response (whether intuitive or cognitive) to the images in the archive is about releasing the imagination in order to claim the material as one's own, and about discovering the archive's *potential* narrative rather than the narrative ascribed to the material by the filmmakers or – in the case of ethnographic films and propaganda material – the political function of the material. The victors may have been responsible for creating the archive, but what were the experiences of the victims?

## On 'releasing the imagination'

Pedagogy demands that the limits of the educator's imagination not be imposed on the student or become the limits for the students. In this sense the research questions posed by the students and their responses – that which they intuit from the material – serves to release the potential and the relation between 'what is there' (that which is present) and what is possible (absent but evident as an erasure) and its potential (the sense of possibility as future).

'Of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions.' (Greene, 1995, p3)

## On artistic research

Insight may be gained by changing the focus from 'discipline' to 'mentality':

'What role can aesthetics play in a world where positions fix themselves? Artistic research suggests an ethos that appeals to us, namely the open-ended quest for the aesthetic. In an age when 'beyonds' are being created anew – now with the aim of our fending them off – artistic research is stimulating the exploration or eluding of boundaries and prompts us to shuttle between the domains that we thought had nothing to do with each other. This means that artistic research is not a discipline but a mentality, not the dominion of artists and critics alone but of the beholder as well. (Van Brummelen and De Haan, 2011, 121)

## On 'the visual'

'Thinking through the Visual' – at odds with 'visual thinking' – is about what we dub the 'agglutinative mode.' ... The agglutinative brings into play associative manoeuvres, juxtaposition, blend and splice, non-inflexional modes of elision and stickiness. We have a dramatic contrast by setting it off against parsing – a function that epitomizes the 'slice and carve' mechanism of grammar. It is about chopping up flows of information, experience, and thought into combinatory bits, modules, units and packets to configure them into algorithmic sequences, into the computational mode.' (Sarat Maharaj, 2009, 4)

These three quotes offer valuable insights into the relationship between pedagogy, artistic research and practice.

The term 'agglutinative mode' is used to describe the process of bringing together discrete parts to create a new whole. Its origins lie in a linguistic theory about how language develops through small parts called morphemes being brought together to create new, complex concepts, with the discrete elements remaining recognisable. Consider how we analysed the archival material in each of its discrete parts: first we looked at the broad context or where it came from and then we drilled down to the image itself, outside the broader contextual meaning. Contextual meaning is not just the historical production meaning but also includes the duality of images in relation to the narrative. In other words: *montage*. But here I was further interested in the image itself - the meaning in the image as a single smallest unit, a morpheme if you will. For me this idea is useful when working with different disciplines since it allows one to recognise and analyse each discrete element (singular images, not to be conflated with single frames). This is what Sarat Maharaj (see quote opposite) refers to as 'parsing':

one then draws what one needs from it by 'slicing and carving' those elements to create something new. This quote connects to my curiosity around a method described (with some difference from the agglutinative but nevertheless productive) by Paul Carter in *Material Thinking*. When collaborators use material thinking they each offer contributions or 'blots' to the process. Blots can be questions, observations or responses that are used to make a whole in which the individual contributors in the practice and process eventually cannot be distinguished in their individual parts; ultimately the blots cannot be identified individually. So material thinking means recognising how process is about components at play, about slicing and carving and about bringing elements into a relationship with each other to create something new. In some ways it goes back to the idea that the sum is greater than the parts, but when we use this method some parts (or blots) are still identifiable in some shape or form while others cannot be singularly identified.

Material thinking is performed in making – making thinking, thinking making ... we again turn over words – communicative function – in this compound of interests afforded by the terms material thinking.

(Rosenburg and Fairfax, 2008, 3)

[Material thinking is] an apt image of remembering beyond nostalgia. It captures the way in which creative collaborations individually create undistinguishable blots. It also suggests how, collectively their appearance makes possible a new conversation ... and it is out of these implicated processes that a third apprehensive emerges. When it emerges in this way, it constitutes material thinking.

(Carter, 2004, 5)

# Process

The students and I shared the central research themes that informed our exploration of the colonial archive: memory, history, identity, displacements (migration), challenging hegemonic narratives and addressing cinematic conventions. We further explored cinematic languages in relation to cinematic innovation, particularly as it related to the visual grammar of filmmaking and film traditions. The students' anchored positions in the world as film practitioners, informed by their subjectivities, determined how they as individuals related to the archive as an institution and to the archival film material itself.

This awareness of our own historical, socio-political immediacy – the now and its relation to the critique of the now (Greene's 'critical pedagogy') – created an environment conducive to critical imagination. So while the immediate and initial reaction of the students was one of cautious engagement, the process facilitated an opening up, an unfettering from the disciplines and disciplinary boundaries to mentality (Van Brummelen and De Haan), enabling an agglutinative mode (Maharaj) through which possibilities could be harnessed that related directly to the critical questions expressed by the students.

In Greene's thinking, an awareness of one's own historical position raises an acute awareness of the politics of one's position, creating possibilities for reflexive critique. It also requires that one changes how one thinks about, for example, filmmaking as a discipline, and encourages switching to a mentality (a way of thinking) across, between and against disciplines. It allows the practitioner (in this case the student) to become more cognisant of the research questions being posed or explored. Even more significantly it enables a sharpening of the question or questions when confronted with the stimulus. In this case the stimulus is the film archive that (1) is the research tool (2) demands that the student move away from reading the images' 'surface' (implicitly including their narrative constituents). In short, they remove themselves from the historical intention of the images. This is the process of 'parsing' described above; the analysis of the images for their syntax. The next step of the process is all about 'slicing and carving' and 'unlearning' the images from their historical conditions of production. The third step allows for the appropriation of the 'unlearned' materials to place them at the service of one's own research objectives. This allows the student to 'move along'; to advance the research of the project. He or she 'takes ownership' of the material and becomes 'the beholder' (Van Brummelen and De Haan), reading the images afresh with their own interpretations. But this alone (reading the images in a way that is new; fresh and outside of its intended meaning) is not sufficient in this approach or methodology for 'thinking-making, making-thinking' as a process. This method requires that the material reveal the thinking-through as part of the making. Rather than being simply an exercise in arriving at a position, it is also an exposition of how that position came to be arrived at. By this I mean that the final 'object' (in this case the film) is not a product but that it reveals something

of the process by which it is arrived at. Another issue relating to pedagogy in this context is the matter of the reflexive awareness regarding methodologies. Can the practitioner-student recognise the efficacy of the methods employed and the aspects in the process that enable the advancement of his or her research? This is something that also requires some time and critical distance. The immediacy of the project was not conducive to reflection or to framing questions regarding the 'what' of the process and method. But in terms of the pedagogic process, the final film-related projects revealed how aesthetic choices are linked to the subjectivities explored in the material itself, and how the subjectivities of the student-filmmakers became evident through their aesthetic choices. This matter is explored further in the section below detailing each project in the exhibition.

**'[The] emphasis on subjectivity building is for me one of the key interfaces between the possibilities offered by some contemporary art practices and multimodality. The implication of this is significant. If the recruiting of subjectivity is to be pursued ... then an aesthetic sensibility is fundamental to this pursuit.'**

**(Andrew, 2014, 184)**

\* One of the recurring concerns expressed by the students was the perceived 'weight' of the images: the sense that the colonial archive was burdened with historical, racial and political significance that could not be countered or challenged.

Could the images be anything but the oppressive readings that the colonial gaze had imposed on them?

**'There is no evidence in the structural logic of the filmstrip that distinguishes "footage" from a "finished" work. Thus any piece of film may be regarded as "footage", for use *in any imaginable way* to construct and reconstruct a new work. Therefore, it may be possible for the meta-historian to take old work as "footage" and construct from it identical new work necessary to a tradition.'**

(Hollis Frampton, 2015, 136)



## Ethics\* and the use of Archive

Thus far I have foregrounded matters relating to method and artistic research as a way of informing methodologies and as a pedagogic approach that privileges process-driven enquiries – specifically in relation to film material and film practices. I will now offer some thoughts on how the matter of content (in this case the archive) was approached.

Working with the colonial film archive at EYE allowed us to revisit histories and subjectivities and enable colonial re-imaginings that hold the coloniser accountable to the colonised in a politically re-energised way. Rethinking colonial history makes both subjects (the coloniser and the colonised) accountable in ways that were not possible in the past, creating space for emotions that would otherwise have been repressed: it affords opportunities for subjectivities of the oppressed to acknowledge dislocation, anger and sadness, to demand redress and to imagine revisionist narratives or revised histories.

**'It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement'**

(Jacques Derrida, 1995 p. 91)

Derrida goes further in *Archive Fever*, asserting that the real function of the archive is to keep the material alive by repeatedly returning to it for a re-examination that produces possibilities of meaning to the point when the trace (the artefacts) and its precedents cannot be distinguished. It is this search for a truth that demands constant re-examination of the archive. This is the approach we assumed when we examined the colonial archive, to take the invitation that the contemporary (re-)examination of the archive would generate new possibilities for its meaning outside of the nostalgia of the historical context.

**'The complaint that images are taken out of context (cultural context, artistic intention, previous contexts of any sort) is not valid. To struggle to bind again to their source is not only impossible (as it actually produces a new meaning); it is to miss what is powerful about them, their capacity to generate meaning, and not merely to transmit it.'**

(Buck-Morss, 2015, 88)

Through the process of collective screenings and ensuing discussions with this group of students, it became increasingly apparent that for the archive to be explored to its fullest potential both the material aspects of the film and the origin of the material (the films' provenance) had to be acknowledged. At times the provenance was accounted for in the process and then the material could be

re-appropriated by the students to explore aspects of their own research enquiry. That is: they could use the confrontation with the archival film material as a way to understand and work with their own research topic. Throughout the process various iterations (both discussions of versions and edited versions of the film material) facilitated the exploration of the material; and each iteration in turn posed alternative possibilities in relation to the questions posed. Each step in the process prompted further responses and readings (of the images) that diverged from what was initially or instantaneously perceived. The method of returning to possibilities of meanings and rethinking the research question demonstrates that process is fundamental to thinking, re-examination and openness to reconsiderations. This constant reassessment, re-evaluation was necessary to refine the research question. Thus the archival material functions as a prompt or confrontation in order to reassess or reconsider the framing of the research question.

## Method: brief for students

Students were encouraged to explore method, using the archive as the stimulus. The approach encouraged students to research the provenance (origin) of the archival material as the starting point but then try to draw their research interests into it. This in some ways is converse to the archival logic of institutional cataloguing which accounts for documentation of the origin, the practice of its inventory within a collection, and the institutional relation to the material.

The first task therefore accounts for the historical context and the 'source' that is described and defined by the archival inventory. For many students, uncovering the archival cataloguing posed the most immediate set of ethical concerns and questions:

Can the material be used in a way that breaches the 'intention' that the archive context ascribes to it?

Is the material bound to the 'surface' reading – that can be prised open, which could free it from the historical context (the material's production history) – framed by the prescripts of the archive as an institution?

In other words, the framing device of 'colonial archival images' immediately renders a political and moral coding that assumes certain racial, ideological, gendered representations as 'inherent' to the material. This further begs the question of the contextual content (the framing device) and further challenges students to interrogate the visual grammar of the images themselves.

For example:

- Are the images inherently racialised through a 'camera gaze' in the documentation of peoples in the colonies?
- What (new) meaning is produced through a series of relational images (montage): the edit or assembly (the sequencing of images) that culminates in a cohesive and possibly alternative meaning?
- Does the meaning produced emerge from the relation between sound and image (inter-titles, voice-over, music, character, narrative) and are these framing devices responsible for producing or affirming ascribed racialised and/or racist meanings?
- If the film is stripped of these cinematic devices and reduced to its core of images 'as footage', can the historical intentions be subverted, challenged and repurposed to produce a wholly new and alternative narrative informed by a different set of interrogative questions that the students demand of the footage?

This means the archive was akin to a Pandora's Box which invited 'foraging'; invited the artist/filmmaker to experiment, explore and research ideas that initially might feel elusive, furtive or even inarticulate but may become accessible through different ways of 'handling' the material.

The students therefore had to be open to discovering the material or content – to make it malleable in their own hands, shaped and sculptured by their own research preoccupations, and to recognise the 'what happens if I do this ... or that ... or the other?' with the ideas they have at hand. In short: 'How does it shape how I think about my research question?'

Similar to the way in which an alchemist experiments with temperature changes, exposure to other elements, porosity and compounding elements, the artist/filmmaker relies on collaborative feedback, research and testing the elasticity of the idea in order to develop the concept towards the execution – the final stage when the concept is realized.

The joy of the project was to view all this as PLAY: making-meaning from making (thinking-making, making-thinking) found in the possibilities of meanings rather than a singular or a definitive meaning (in this case possibilities created collectively as process and then collaboratively or as individuals).

This playfulness is about imagining holding the idea in your hands and, in a literal way imagining what happens when you stretch the idea – squeeze it, wring it or even fold it.

It is about experiencing the tactility of ideas.

'Multimodal' refers specifically to the identification of a further mode within the range of modes available to us for making meaning. These modes are described as: the audio, the spatial, the visual, the gestural and the linguistic.'

(The New London Group, 2000, 25)

'The multimode is that which happens in the moment as the maker of meaning adjusts and responds to the different circumstances, repertoires, and resources at his/her disposal – and acts in relation to these presences. It is this further mode that arguably, is often central to the repertoire of some contemporary artists working in installatory, dialogical and relational modes.'

(Andrew, 2014, 185)

Now let's consider how practice relates to the production of knowledge.

## Practice of knowledge

What might knowledge look like when viewed as a practice? How might knowledge be described when seen as a practice?

I would like to suggest that rather than being a dusty repository of artefacts, documents and catalogued evidence, the archive as an institution is a veritable hive of activity and productivity.

The hive as the home for bees evokes the metaphoric connotations of LABOUR. This is in sharp contrast to the word PLAY which on its surface belies the idea of any serious endeavour or the idea of labour with a committed outcome. But play is productive; it is governed by rules and an acute awareness of repetition and role-play, such as when children repeat gestures in the act of learning and perfecting a skill.

The archive, then, is by no means a dormant, dusty repository. It is a place of incredible possibilities and meanings; a place with rules but also with the space to invent and re-invent games that challenge different ideas and historical roles. It is precisely this engagement with the past that facilitates a profound understanding of the present and which provides a way to understand or project a future or futures.

## Production of knowledge

In this instance, the ethnographic film archive is a starting point which offers a comprehensive body of knowledge of how the colonisers might have viewed, observed and documented the colonies. It was a way to bring back home in images and visual stories, the exoticisms of the East and Africa which produced a historical justification for conquest that was anchored deeply in the historical colonial logic of 'civilising the native.'

In a revisiting of the archive close to a hundred years later, the narratives of the colonised peoples become more apparent - we seek to understand the gestures, looks and subtext that reveal their immediate experiences. Let us pose this question: If we consider the archive through the subjectivities of the colonised, might the archive reveal itself differently than it was through the lens directed by the colonial framework? Revisiting the archive offers an opportunity for the Object (i.e. the colonised) to move to the position of Subject.

The colonial gaze is no longer deemed objective nor is the apparatus of the camera considered neutral in this instance - the act of looking harbours a strong awareness of the power relationships between the subject (the then 'object') observed and the subjectivity of the documenter.



Programme opened to show front and back cover with full exhibition title that captures the relation between the practice and the production of knowledge



## CURATORIAL STATEMENT

The vast repository of images produced in the colonial histories of Indonesia, India and South Africa is testimony of ethnographic documentation of cultures that were foreign to the gaze of the Dutch coloniser. A century later, investigating these images provides a liberating entry point to reassess how the archive might operate outside the bounds of its provenance.

In this Research Lab at EYE, master's students from the Netherlands Film Academy worked with South African artist in residence Jyoti Mistry to experiment in politically strategic ways with alternative narratives of histories, subjectivities and political experiences.

Writing back to history through films using the film archives, these projects are not simply about revisionist histories from the points of view of the subjects being observed but further aim to challenge the historical gaze regimes of these ethnographic images.

Each of the projects serves to suggest a contemporary relevance that invites personal reflection on a broader socio-cultural canvas. It is a way of exploring the film material as repository, as a place to play, where there is pleasure in the possibilities of meaning-making rather than in defining or finding a singular, definitive meaning in the material. They engage with the pleasure of imagining how ideas are held together through filmic representations and images.

In this way, the archive becomes a poignant inspiration for the release of the cinematic imagination and of narrative possibilities.

# The exhibition

The exhibition *Archive as a Place to Play* is the outcome of a series of interrogative questions that students posed to the archive film material.

The film projects, and projects on film, are provocations, responses and reactions. At times they resist the material or suggest a reticence to engage with it directly. The projects are a reflection of the archival material unbound from its historical intentions and freed by the imagination of filmmakers.

## The film projects – projects on film

Our immediate reactions and reflections on viewing the film material from the archive presented the occasion for deliberation on the historical and political undertakings of visual ethnography. The material engendered a feeling of disquiet, a discontent with the historical politics of representation and identity inherited from watching a colonial gaze at work. This material is about not just the coloniser and the colonised, or white and black race politics; it is about gendered relations of looking as well. There are long takes that observe voyeuristically – unbeknownst to those being watched. At other times those being observed spot the camera and cast furtive glances at the apparatus that apocryphally 'captured their soul'. The material documents the lives of colonial administrators over time, showing the rituals of quotidian life: children bathing, unwrapping gifts, playing on bicycles. Occasionally we see a local (Indonesian or black) child amongst the white family. We see families on holiday at the beach, women with parasols, men in trousers rolled to the knees. Men and women in bathing suits either dodge the crashing waves or brace themselves to meet them, while others sit on the rocks being observed by the camera as they observe others. There are also multiple sequences documenting the industrious mechanisms of colonial trade: the loading of cargo at docks – black men toiling there, black women toiling in the fields. There are also glimpses of the rituals performed by the colonised people, and everyday activities such as fishing and bathing, of women performing the domestic chores of cooking and washing clothes, boys playing on the beach shore, tumbling into the water, and young men wrestling.

Apart from the documented material we were fortunate to have the feature film *The Rose of Rhodesia* (Harold M. Shaw, South Africa, 1917) amongst the items offered to us from the archive. This full-length film caught our imagination, with its theme of a woman alone amongst multiple men in the African bush. The many 'natives' are there to serve the ambitions of white diamond mine owners, and the priests are there to 'save the souls' of the colonised subjects and function as the conscience of the woman (Rose) and the white settlers. Apart from the convoluted narrative and the obvious historical, racial and gendered representational politics, the form of the film and its visual syntax (the editing style, the use of inter-titles with extensive plot explanations, excerpts from the bible as separate inter-titles and inserts) provided the provocations necessary to allay any concerns that the footage was bound to its historical intentions. The syntax is the smallest inherent meaning of the image and hence, when, as a practitioner, one begins to read the images in this way, ethical dilemmas are dispelled to enable the filmmaker to recognise the potential in reimagining the meaning of the images. Thus the film could be approached as footage, to be accessed as a way to generate new, alternative possibilities and meanings.

Film's material nature (strips with burns, scratches and sprocket holes) prompted the students to consider how the technical shift to modern digital filmmaking is also generative of meaning and thus produces a series of questions around memory, archives and futures.

**'The archive, part of the institutional apparatus first mobilised in the nineteenth century to sever history from memory, came back as a site for their reunion. In this sense, the archive signalled towards the obligation to dig below the surface of history for the documentary traces of what it concealed: not history as a succession of memorable events, but as the excavation of the forgotten memories of lived experiences; not things the way they really were, but the way they really felt, including for those who most suffered their violence. And for this task artists were presumed to be better equipped than most historiographers.'**

(Velázquez, 2015, 183)



SOPHIE DIXON  
Untitled 2016

For decades, major libraries and institutions have invested heavily in the conversion of analogue materials into digital form. Digitisation is both a means of making materials more widely accessible and a means of preserving them. A sketch questions what forgetting may mean in a digital age which promises to remember everything.

Untitled 2016



Audience interacts with *Untitled 2016*



Sections from the students' artist statements have been included in what follows - less as an exegesis of the work but rather as a gateway to the central questions or enquiries that informed the project. Here I reflect on some of the conceptual undertakings and offer a few brief hermeneutic observations.

Student Sophie Dixon's work contemplates the challenges for archival storage and archiving itself. In the contemporary moment of the digital age when there is an overproduction of images, knowledge is being collapsed or conflated with information or knowledge is being seen as information. Dixon's reflective account, installed as a desktop interface with multiple layers of screen searches, interrogates what digital technology implies for forgetting, for digital amnesia, or what some theorists have termed 'the coming of a digital dark age'.

The work raised a number of questions regarding the worth of mass accumulations of data as archive. What might be of value? What is worthy of archiving in a time of information overload? Her piece invited reflection on the following questions: What constitutes meaningful value on the layers upon layers of immediate information? How is information distinct from knowledge? Does information enable the pursuit of knowledge? This is measured against the impermanence of the materiality of the medium of digital files and codes.

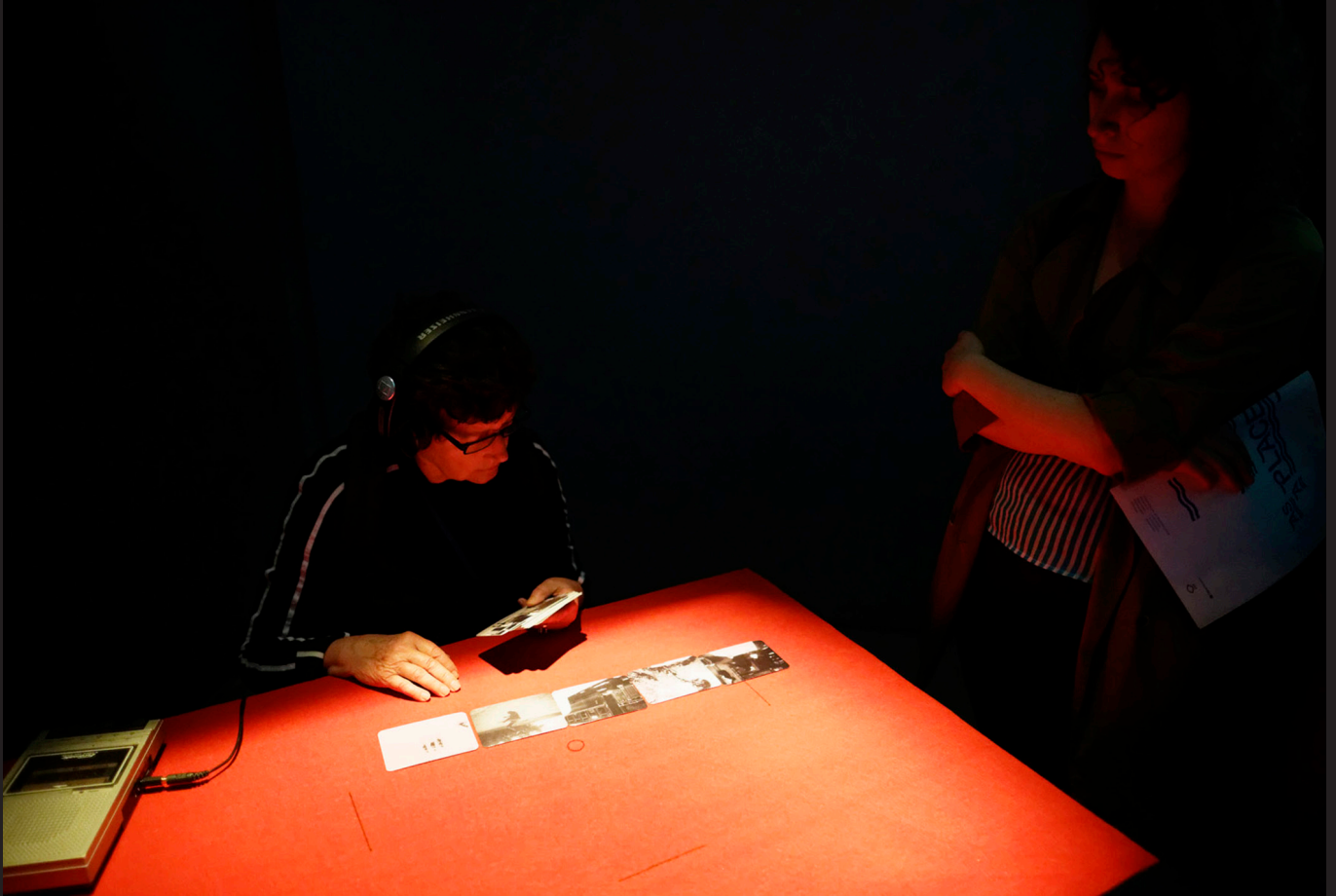
How might the shift in the materiality of the medium from celluloid to digital files implicate or influence knowledge production? How does a digital mode of storing film images outside its historical provenance change their meaning if they are shown across different media and platforms?

If the medium is the message, as Marshall McLuhan insisted in his seminal 1967 text, then platforms are not equivalent and the experience of the medium itself is implicated, at least in part, in the production of meaning.

ÁRON BIRTALAN  
*Patience (a game)*

This experimental storytelling game uses the framework of single-player card games such as Patience, assembled from a diversity of framed stills selected from the archive material. A deck of cards is constructed and the single player has to follow instructions played through an audio guide. A variety of solitary playing forms create unique, reconstituted narratives which are inspired from the archival material. The game also evokes fortune-telling traditions.

*Interacting with the card game *Patience (a game)**



*Trial card game*





Aron Birtalan's *Patience (A Game)* is an ingenious work that reconceptualises historical images as a card game, evoking materiality and tactility from a wholly different vantage point. Quietly contemplative, it takes the form of a deck of cards constructed using images from the archive that invite thought-provoking personal connection. A series of instructions – crisply enunciated over the headphones – uses images of the past to style possibilities for the future. The work demands that the spectator surrender to the narrative unfolding from the random spread of cards. The work creates a clairvoyant experience – a vision of the future evoked through one's own personal associations, forming a narrative structure. The audio track guides the placement and associative connections required of the spectator, but the absence of any interaction, save for the instructions delivered by this disembodied voice, ensures that the spectator's experience becomes constructively meditative.

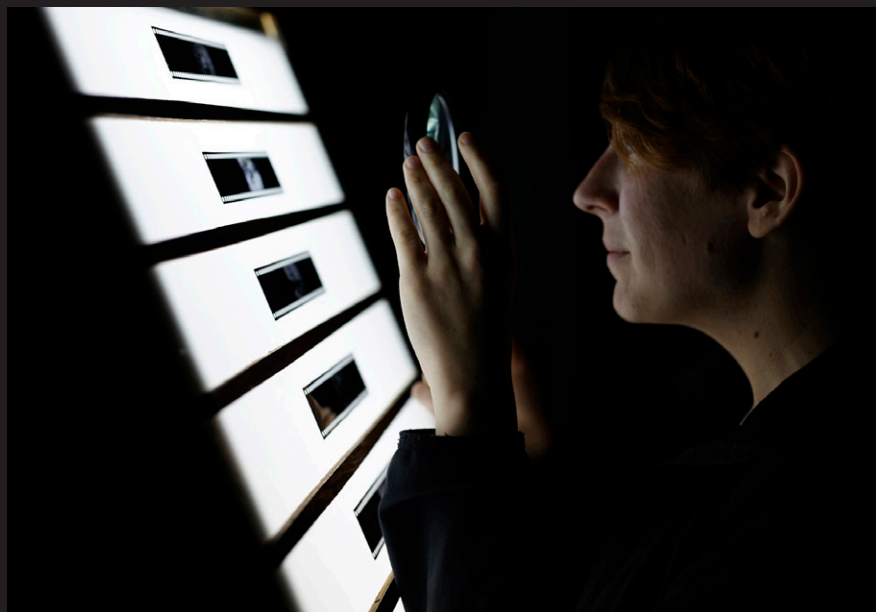
GUSTAVO LORGIA GARNICA  
Monumental Fragments of Our Distance

These archival images hold singular power: they contain elements that communities have lost because of the accelerated and imposed rhythm of modern times which have superseded their traditional ways of living.

*Monumental Fragments of Our Distance*  
Details coloured in on 35mm stills to draw attention to cultural artefacts



Member of the public viewing details of coloured  
35mm stills



Drawing from a concern with materiality and interactive spectatorship relationships *Monumental Fragments of Our Distance* by Gustavo Garnica has a uniquely forensic quality. The execution of the project demands that images historically projected as moving images are suspended, in time and space, and recoloured and reproduced as 35mm still frames to be seen on a light box as a film strip. By decontextualizing the image from the surrounding frames and embellishing it with colour that highlights cultural markers, the filmmaker attempts to grapple with a cultural-historical past of first and indigenous peoples. This experience invites an intimate encounter with the images viewed through a magnifying lens at close range.

ALEX PERRY  
*Ons levenslied*

The basis of this exploration is the polysemous quality of historical family narratives, with an emphasis on tragedy and private shame. The artist is interested in the archive as a visual representation of memory triggers in a fragmentary dream of confession, the mechanics of which are borrowed from Catholic orthodoxy.

*Ons levenslied* from *Ons levenslied*, 1918 (original film)



Viewing inside the confession booth



Quotidian life is emblematic in the early twentieth century home movies film *Ons levenslied* (NL, Henk van den Bussche, 1918-1931, 35mm, silent, b/w. Production by Familie van den Bussche). *Ons levenslied* ('Our life story') documents thirteen years in the life of a white family in the Dutch colony now known as Indonesia. The camera captures the banality of the everyday: children playing, bath-time rituals, family gatherings, playing in the garden and learning to ride bicycles. These family activities are documented in the form of performances for the camera, a phenomenon examined by Annette Kuhn in her 1995 book *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*. These staged scenes hide the layers of family secrets, emotions and betrayals from the camera. Alex Perry's eponymous project speaks directly to these hidden layers of family lives, to the memories and private trauma hidden beneath. The film is viewed inside a small 'confession booth' making for an intimate viewing experience which invites a feeling of being part of a confession. It challenges the surface meanings of these domestic images through an audio track of confessions about experiences of domestic violence, betrayal of familial safety and shame. The audio narrative, reserved in tone, is a haunting reminder of the staging of domestic photography and film in a time long before the immediacy of snapshots and selfies. It also brings to the fore the way in which erasures in the archive can be made present through new forms of representations. Archival erasures are summoned by stories recalled, when images function as triggers or jolts for memory.

**'Symbolic wounds calling for healing are stored in the archives of the collective memory'**

**(Ricouer, 2004, 79)**



KRISTINA DAUROVA  
EYE Contact

Eye contact is a form of non-verbal communication. It is the most reliable, the most dangerous, the most honest and the most 'unreadable' form of human connection. The individuals in the film no longer exist. There is no more time and no more space. There is only our eye contact – across time and space. How do we see ourselves when they look at us?

*EYE Contact from Amsterdam-Batavia door de lucht, 1930*



WIETSKE DE KLERK  
Beneath the Surface

The notion of personal perception of place plays an important role in this archival research. All the individuals we see in these shots have had different experiences of that single moment in the specifics of the place. Everybody perceives this place differently, because the spectators project their backgrounds onto that beach. Reframing and manipulating the archival material makes it possible to home in on the individual dreams and desires of the people on this beach and enable the search for the personal within the wider panoramic shots.

*Beneath the Surface from  
Holiday in Port Elizabeth, 1918  
(frame dimensions reformatted to  
panorama)*



Both Kristina Daurova's *EYE Contact* and Wietske de Klerk's *Beneath the Surface* pose questions about collective memory: what is absent (the elision) in the images is made present, palpable through their technical treatment of the material. Each film is equally invested in considering the formal aspect of film language to interrogate how certain meanings come to be evoked through editing, and how the students' technical choices expose their own curiosities about perception, reality and location.

*EYE Contact* is a subtle unfolding of the awareness of the camera and a play at the performance of reality - its 'realism', which in cinema is crucial to maintaining the fourth wall or the illusion of reality that is repeatedly reproduced by the act of pretending not to see the camera. This exploration begs the return of and re-engagement with the ethnographic gaze in a deeply affecting way that also challenges the idea that what is memorialised through the act of documenting in photography is made immortal. This haunting effect produced by a recognition of the camera's presence suggests that a historical past that must be reckoned with through a contemporary looking back at a returning of the ethnographic gaze, creates an awareness of the people in the image rather than of the image itself.

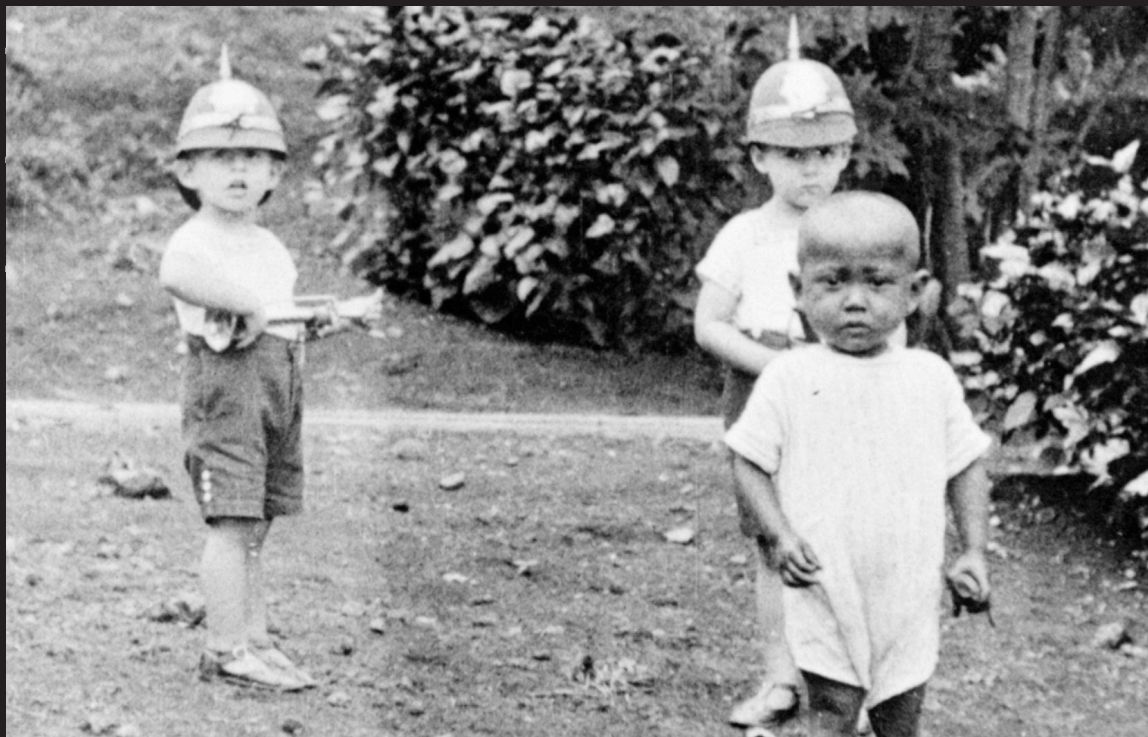
Wietske de Klerk reframed stills and sequences by manipulating images, frame sizes and aspect ratios, to expose how cinematic framing directs and manipulates the eye of the observer. By constantly challenging initial assumptions, the work makes the viewer cognisant of cinema's manipulative strategies. Inspired by Trinh T. Minh-ha's now-iconic phrase 'the framer framed' (1992) this piece shows the filmmaker's hand in drawing attention to the characters through framing and screen size. In so doing, the project moves beyond the surface to the deeper structure of meaning, examining critical practice in creative work and exposing the lines between documented facts and documentary as an interpretation of facts. It seeks to reveal the poetry in the politics of framing; what is excluded from the frame is just as important as what is included.

If we were to demand a revised history that speaks to our oppressed pasts hidden in the archive, then how might we relook at the footage in the conscious act of returning the gaze?

LOUIS HOTHOTHOT  
Letters to Magritte #1 FATHER

An allegorical and personal exploration of the relationship between father and son, in the past and in the present. What is the relation between a white father and a dark-skinned son? How does a father look at his non-biological son?

*Letters to Magritte #1 FATHER  
from Ons levenslied, 1918*



EMILIO REYES BASSAIL  
Antipodes

The archive footage is used to tell a coming-of-age story that poses a layered question about identity, colonialism, trans-generational trauma and an individual act of editing historical footage to explore memory and collective history.

*Antipodes from Afrika (negers), 1925*





The immediate and direct experience of colonial, oppressive histories is explored in *Letters to Magritte #1 Father* by Louis Hothothot and *Antipodes* made by Emilio Reyes Bassail. These films draw attention to historically colonised, collectivised and marginalised peoples and communities and individualises their experiences to produce empathy through stories of imagined experiences and subjectivities. These new works visualise historical erasures and orchestrate historical elisions to relate the perspectives of the colonised – no longer from the position of the coloniser but through intimate encounters of pain, alienation and loss of identity. Multiple languages and a diversity of cultural semiotics are drawn together to prevent any homogenisation of the narrative of the colonised.

**'How do we remember ghostly histories and their traces in our lives and in our ideas when our memories are conspirators, collaborative agents and traitors; when too many important books (in both the literal and metaphoric sense of the term: the story) have been set aside ... What does it mean to conceive of oneself as a giver of shape to ghosts?'**

**(Gordon, 1999, 93)**

DANIEL DONATO  
What You Are?

A body that changes over time and assumes another form and identity.  
A body that is based on sexuality.  
A body that sees itself as being different or displaced from normal conventions.  
A body that is questioning, searching for answers to prove itself.

What You Are?



LISA-MARIE VLIETSTRA  
Por Qué No Me Ves / Why Don't You See Me?

Estranged archetypal suggestions, translations and continuous re-presentations of one woman left alone. It portrays a broken character, who is fragmented and dissected by herself and others, over and over again.

Why Don't You See Me,  
composite with scene from  
*Rose from Rhodesia*, 1917



Daniel Donato's *What You Are?* is an intimate portrait of sexuality, one in which he removes the surface of the image and wholly radicalises the meaning of childhood innocence by revealing the uncertainty of sexuality as a correlate to gender. This work reminds us that the gender of children cannot determine their future sexuality or desires. The children in the images from the archive are learning their roles in culturally and socially determined ways: boys with bikes; girls with little sewing machines. As one looks again and again at the archival material, held together in the latter half of the film by a melancholy Indonesian song, the girls and boys become interchangeable, indistinguishable. On the image surface there are no socio-cultural gender markers such as clothing, hairstyle or attributes that distinguish the boys from the girls; we cannot discern their gender using any socio-cultural clues such as hairstyle or clothing. Their sexuality is outside of the frame - projected into a future when desire is explored and learned - cannot ever be captured on the surface of the film. Donato's film addresses our contemporary concerns with the fluidity of desire and challenges the assumptions of hetero-normative pasts and presents anchored in bodies where sexuality can only be learned through acts of becoming.

Realism in cinema has always been about capturing authentic and credible narrative worlds that produce empathy in audiences who allow the storyteller's imagination to suspend their disbelief. But making transparent the mechanisms of meaning-making and opening up the process to scrutiny demands an enhanced understanding of storytelling modes and cinematic syntax and semantics that challenges the fundamental assumptions underpinning cinematic convention.

Lisa-Marie Vlietstra's *Why Don't You See Me?* is an examination of how the consistency of performers and recognisable actors is always at the service of realism, with the intended effect being that audiences identify with the emotions of characters and their story. In a radical exposure of the construction of cinematic conventions, Vlietstra's film demands commitment to story, emotions and events that are driven by actors who are interchangeable but made coherent through a host of female actors who play versions of the same character. The female emotions are congruent and continuous over time and space, reflecting these women's deep desires, sexual longing and incredible loneliness.

\* Artistic research enables a number of modes to co-exist simultaneously: interrogation, reflection, reflexivity in the practice of making and doing.

This approach and its attendant methods (in this case with the archive) affords the practitioner (here the teacher-practitioner with the students) opportunities and possibilities to effect modes of pedagogy that are critical for enabling the imagination of students.

The real challenge is to enable the imagination of others through an openness in each individual's artistic practice, while at the same time recognising how fundamentally important collaborations are to widening and transcending the strictures (or experience) of the practitioner-pedagogue.

## Conclusion: Possibilities for new modes\*

Without exception, the works in *Archive as a Place to Play* found dynamic and sometimes radical ways for contemplating the resource of the archive as a way of challenging historically anchored representations.

The unmooring of meanings and predetermined experiences removed the singularity of historically determined narratives which were meticulously documented.

Repositories of ethnographic or any other images invite, force, demand examination and re-examination, again and again. The images are surfaces, but they are endlessly deeper structures moving from the surface from which we, like the filmmakers in this exhibition, can draw and project contemporary experiences, express subjectivities and reshape the historical and political meanings of images over time.

The notion of a separation between production of knowledge and practice of knowledge is a ruse, a smokescreen. The production of knowledge is about the practice of knowledge being a latticing of perhaps known or familiar elements with the processes that move towards the unknown. The practice of knowledge captures the continuum towards the production of knowledge: what Sarat Maharaj refers to as the 'know how' to the 'no how'; the awareness, movement and shift from information to questioning, from certainty of knowledge to a questioning of knowledge. Expressed in another way, these are two ideas on the opposite ends of the knowledge spectrum or continuum: the knowing (how) <- -> no-ing (how).

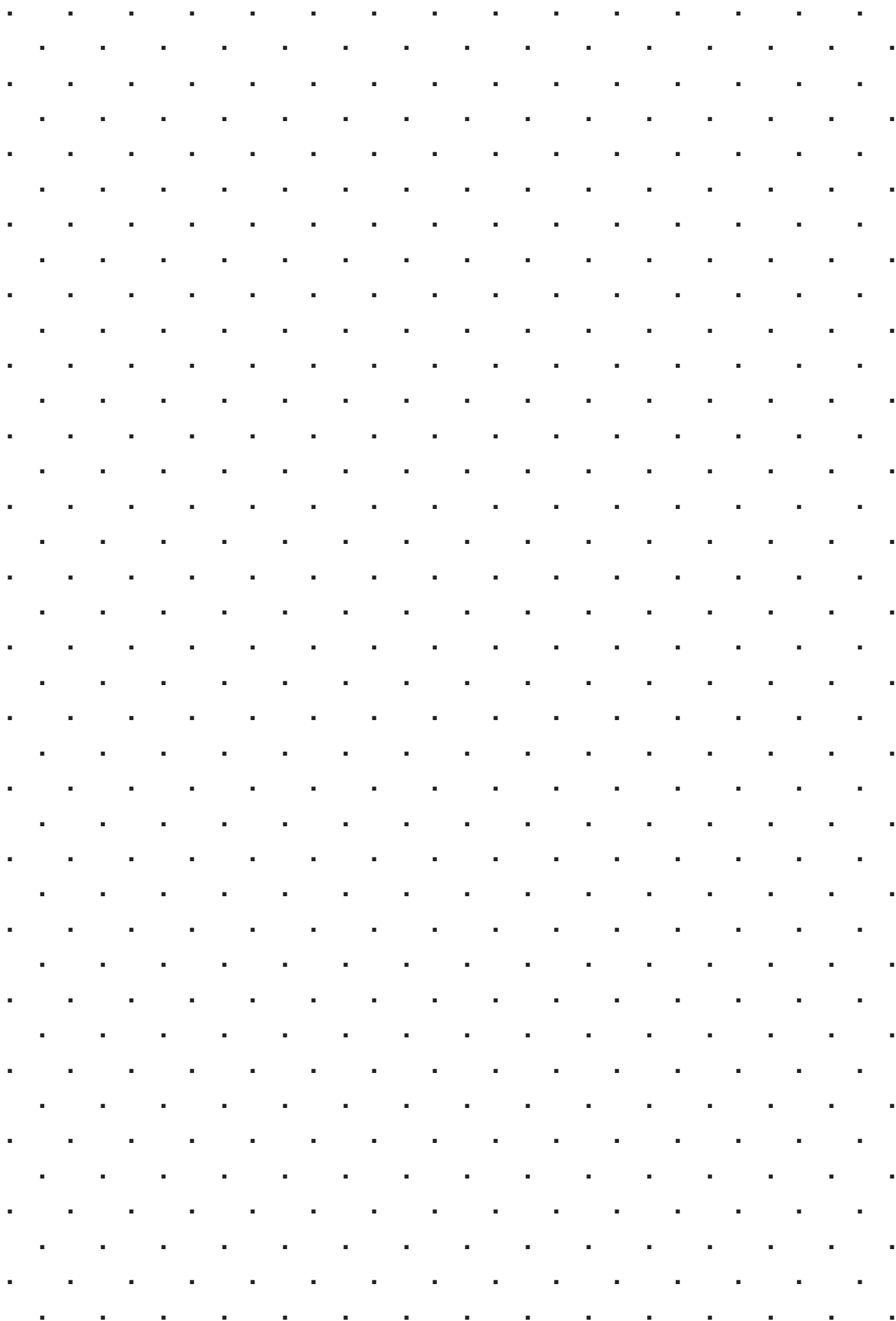
It is through this process of moving within the practice that we come to understand a little more of the unknown; to produce knowledge. Production of knowledge and the practice of knowledge are not exclusive of each other but inextricably linked, entwined, latticed and in a discursive, dialectic relationship enabled through the mentality of artistic research - a mentality that invites practitioners to reconceive pedagogic strategies and methodologies which revitalises the possibilities for, in this case, film as a language and not simply or rather singularly as a vehicle for storytelling.

What this exhibition brought to the fore, both through the process and the final realisation, is that the practice of knowledge informs the production of knowledge and that the production of knowledge must be constantly subjected to interrogation and experimentation. Only when we find a place to play is it possible to explore new meanings, alternative narrative possibilities and the premise/conceit of becoming - 'becoming' in the sense finding new, alternative ways of describing who we are, where we come from and our potential for the future in re-examining and redefining archival film footage. The film (arc)hive, then, is a productive play-space of and for possibilities, and it is the role of the pedagogue to create the space for safe experimentation in which the capacity for failure is recognised. Pedagogy is ultimately about facilitating and encouraging potential alternatives for the

execution of ideas and perhaps also their gestation/development/birth; for the practice of creating ideas, not just representing or executing them.

In the (arc)hive we find freedom through curiosity - knowledge produces a thirst for more knowledge, and when learning continues, curiosity and interest are insatiable. In the film museum and the film archive we were exposed to the real joy of film; we were able to interpret the images and express multiple subjectivities and experiences that crossed time and place. For the practitioner-pedagogue, too, it is a productive, enriching and rewarding environment because it is also a place to challenge the rigour of one's own practice, politics and passions. The relationship between practice and research is inexorably linked to the production of knowledge, and this process is as vital for the practitioner-pedagogue's examining, re-examining and clarifying of his or her own practice as it is for the students' practice. This reciprocal, three-way latticing of research, practice and pedagogy exposes the increasing relevance of placing artistic research at the centre of forms of thinking-making, making-thinking research in film schools.

And while it is a truism to say that teachers learn from their students, the liberating context of artistic research more explicitly foregrounds the pedagogue-practitioner's knowledge. Practice and research come under rigorous scrutiny, advancing knowledge and making the pedagogue's knowledge apparent. This process directly implicates and makes visible the pedagogue-practitioner's production of knowledge through his or her practice.



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- A Holiday in Port Elisabeth* (UK/ZA, dir. unknown 1918, 35mm, silent, b/w)
- Amsterdam-Batavia door de lucht / Amsterdam-Batavia by Air* (NL, Theo Gusten, 1930, 35mm, silent, b/w. Production by Koningsbak & Cohn)
- Afrika (negers)* (NL, dir. unknown, 1925, 35mm, silent, b/w)
- De Merapi* (NL, dir. unknown, 1921, 35mm, silent, b/w. Production by Nationale Filmfabriek Bloemendaal et al.)
- Rubber cultuurmaatschappij 'Amsterdam' Deli o.k. van Sumatra* (NL, dir. unknown, 1921 [?], 35mm, silent, b/w. Production by Nationale Filmfabriek Bloemendaal [?])
- Door het land van Boeddha en Brahma* (CH, Martin Hurlimann, 1923, 35mm, silent, b/w. Production by Atlantis Film)
- Afrika (negers)* (NL, dir. unknown, 1925, 35mm, silent, b/w)
- Voor-Indie, verleden en heden* (NL, dir. unknown, 1946, 35mm, sound, b/w. Production by Indian Film Unit)
- Bergfilmnieuws* (NL, dir. unknown, 1928, 35mm, silent, b/w)
- By Aeroplane to Pygmyland* (US/NL, dir. unknown, 1927, 35mm, silent, b/w. Production by PIC)
- The Rose of Rhodesia* (ZA, Harold M. Shaw, 1917, 35mm, silent, b/w. Production by AFP (African Film Productions))



*Der Kleine Kuno (1959)*



# When I Grow up I Want to be a Black Man: an exhibition

Jyoti Mistry

The second phase of my tenure as artist in residence involved drawing from the EYE archive that the students had used for *Archive as Place to Play* (the exhibition which I facilitated and curated) and to propose a work for exhibition that informed my own particular research interests.

My interest in archival investigation and repurposing predates this collaboration between myself, the EYE and the Netherlands Film Academy. I was interested in bringing this archive (EYE) into a 'conversation' with an image that had struck me when exploring the archive of the former East Germany (German Democratic Republic, GDR). Here, I would like to briefly contextualise my earlier archival research as I think it goes some way to explicating the connections and through-line of my research preoccupations.

From November 2013 to January 2014 I had the privilege of being a research scholar at the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen (HFF) in Babelsberg, Germany, through a DAAD Scholarship. My research project involved looking at the GDR's film archive, which underwent a shift from a colonial narrative championing the creation of a 'colonial archive' to one advocating 'worker solidarity.' Colonial films justifying and promoting the resource value of investing in African colonies were superseded by films made in the communist GDR that no longer focused on racial differences but rather on the bringing together of races and nations – in the name of class struggle and class solidarity. The archive contains a significant number of films made over the 41-year period from 1949 to 1990 and, the numerous extraordinary campaigns (which included poster art) that reference a 'global worker solidarity' spanning China, Africa and East Germany. The status of the black man as presented in this archive undergoes a dramatic shift from that of dehumanised 'savage' on the resource-rich African continent to comrade, 'brother' and 'fellow worker' – a figure to identify with.

## Context

'Slave' narratives have been told from various historical positions along the slave trade route. Each of these stories reflects on the recurring themes and motifs of violence that show the black subject as victim of historical circumstances and the white subject as the oppressor. Most significantly, the narratives are expressions of oppression in which only the black experience and identity is defined; rarely is there any questioning of the place of 'whiteness' in the story. As Richard Dyer describes aptly in *White* (1997), whiteness is an invisible, imaginary signifier.

*When I Grow up I Want to Be a Black Man* exposes how black subjects have to constantly

claim, fight for and chase freedom, while white subjects always assume their 'freedom' as a given, without consideration of their privileged relation to it.

The installation juxtaposes archival material from the EYE and the GDR film *Der kleine Kuno* (1959) with newly filmed material in order to present two narratives. The storytelling modes offer colonial, counter-colonial and post-colonial experiences of black masculinity.

The live-action material (contemporary material filmed for the installation) serves to complement or at times counter and contradict the archival material.

Furthermore, this video diptych is about masculinity and its focus is on men. Given that I am a female filmmaker it is further about a woman's gaze on masculinity, and specifically black masculinity. It is a clearly female gaze and perspective on the constructs of black masculinity in the context of its history, its currency and its possible futures.

## Synopsis

A black man runs through a field.

A black man runs on the beach.

A black man runs through a city.

The black man is always running, he is always chased, he is always running...

Running for his life.

In *Der kleine Kuno*, a young white boy exclaims 'When I grow up I want to be a black man.' The implication of this expressed desire, wish or ambition is set against the historical backdrop of violence against the black body and burden of racial oppression.

The images of black men in the colonial archive shows the black man working, his body constantly labouring in service to the coloniser. His value always lies in his physical ability and agility. This is the history of the black man.

What is the future of the black man when he is not defined by these historical images?

The future of the black man is at stake in history and contemporary society. The crossings of borders, the ongoing debates on migration and the insistence that 'black lives matter' are symptomatic of the need for a conversation to take place that starts with alternative possibilities for the future and the opportunity for renewed examination of what blackness means in current society. This installation also invites white audiences to recognise the construction of whiteness that historically has not been fully examined through the black experience.



*Der Kleine Kuno (1959)*

# Installation

The two-channel film projection with synchronous sound is an immersive experience. Having two projections alongside each other is about having the past in conversation with the future, or the potential of what the future might offer.

The thin slit on the outside wall as one approaches the installation, invites the audience to peek into the past and future simultaneously: a glimpse of the furtive past; a hint of a possible future.

Only in cinema practice could one have this collapsing of time and space - of simultaneous past and future - and this juxtaposition of archival material and the new live-action material invites contemplation in the present. Once inside the installation, the past and future come together to offer an encounter. On screen one, the voiceover is constructed through the 'alphabet of violence'. Instead of relying on a subjective voice-over recounting experiences (testimony) or theoretical references (perhaps Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, Patrice Lumumba or Malcolm X to name a few possibilities), the voice-over functions as a lexicon of violence. The decision was taken to steer clear of any iconic national or historical figures in order to assert and insist on a meta-discourse on violence (against the black subject) that creates a vocabulary that unmoors any historical, geographical or contemporary references or fixity.

The second screen functions to counterpoint screen one with with an 'alphabet of freedom', which is used to evoke potential, possibility, aspirations and ambitions of a future in which the value of the black man in society is revitalised through a lexicon of freedom.

The script for 'alphabet of violence' and 'alphabet of freedom' was developed in collaboration with the musician, playwright-director and spoken word artist Kgafela oa Magogodi. The approach was used to capture a visceral vocabulary of violence that also embraced the street and/or colloquial and the corporeality of violence on black subjects. Magogodi's rhythmic and repetitious spoken words evoke in the mind's eye images of violence that is denied in the visual representation shown on the screens. On the other hand, this language of freedom resists the fortified terms proselytized by liberation movements. Instead Magogodi includes words that pulse with possibilities of freedoms imagined and enlivening. Freedom in this alphabet is not an abstract construct. It is tactile, tangible and physical - a state of being, a state of lightness that brings freedom to float, to fly.

## Source:

### EYE Filmmuseum, the Netherlands

*De Merapi*

NL, 1921

Dir. Unknown

*By Aeroplane to Pygmyland*

NL/US 1927

Dir. Unknown

[*Afrika (negers)*]

[NL, 1925]

Dir. Unknown

*A Holiday in Port Elisabeth*

[GB/SA] 1918

Dir. Unknown

*The Rose of Rhodesia*

SA, 1917

Dir. Harold M. Shaw

[*Senegal*]

[DE, 1925]

Dir. Unknown

*Culture de la canne à sucre à Java*

FR, 1914

Dir. Unknown

*Langs den Nijl naar het hart van Afrika*

[DE, 1925]

Dir. Unknown

*Met geweer en lasso door Afrika*

[DE, 1925]

Dir. Unknown

*Tabakscultuur in Deli*

NL, 1927

Dir. Willy Mullens

## Source:

### Progress Filmverleih, Germany

*Der kleine Kuno*

Progress VEB DEFA Studio für Spielfilme

DEFA, Germany, 1959

Dir. Kurt Jung-Alsen



# About the authors

## Jyoti Mistry

Jyoti Mistry is a filmmaker and Associate Professor at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in the Wits School of Arts. She has taught at New York University, the University of Vienna, Arcada University of Applied Science Polytechnic in Helsinki and Alle School of Fine Arts at the University of Addis Ababa.

Mistry has been artist in residence on the Whitney Studio Programme (New York City), at California College of Arts (San Francisco), Sacatar (Brazil) and Nirox Foundation (Johannesburg), and a DAAD visiting scholar at HFF Film School in Babelsburg (Germany).

During her tenure as artist in residence at the Netherlands Film Academy (NFA, Amsterdam) in 2016 and 2017 she curated the exhibition *Archive as a Place to Play*, working with the NFA's class of 2017 master's students, using the EYE Film Museum's archive to reimagine the colonial archive. In June 2017 an exhibition will be held at the EYE of her own new installation *When I Grow up I Want to Be a Black Man*, which draws on the same colonial film archive material.

In 2016, Jyoti Mistry was the recipient of the CILECT (International Association of Film and Television Schools) Teaching Award for recognition of excellence in film pedagogy and research in film practice.

Her own artistic practice moves seamlessly between filmmaking and installation art practices. She has made critically acclaimed narrative, documentary and experimental films. Mistry's installation work draws from cinematic traditions that are often re-contextualized for galleries and museums that are outside the linear cinematic experience.

Her feature film *Impunity* (2014) had its international premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival, its European premier at Stockholm Film Festival, and its South African premiere at Durban International Film Festival, followed by a local theatrical release. Her installation *Store in a Cool Dry Place* (2016) explores the rituals of coffin making in three African cities: Accra (Ghana), Johannesburg (South Africa) and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). This was part of the exhibition *When Tomorrow Comes* at Wits Art Museum in Johannesburg followed by Michaelis Galleries in Cape Town.

Mistry's 2013 solo exhibition *Narrative, Memory, Site* at Barengasse Museum in Zurich (Switzerland) included the works *XENOS*, *Building the Invisible City*, *Commuting* and *Le Boeuf Sur Le Toit*. *XENOS* was exhibited separately at Michaelis Gallery, University of Cape Town, from April to May 2015. *Le Boeuf Sur Le Toit* in 2014 was exhibited at Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume Museum in Paris (France).

Mistry's short film *09:21:25* was part of the group show *International Incheon Women Artists' Biennale*, Incheon, South Korea, in November 2011, and was part of *Weltraum (Space: about a Dream) Exhibition*, at Kunsthalle Wien (Vienna), Austria, from April to August 2011.

The installation of *09:21:25* had its solo exhibition at Goethe on Main at Arts on Main, Johannesburg, South Africa (Nov 2011- Jan 2012).

*Le Boeuf sur le Toit* (2010), a film essay on New York, Johannesburg, Vienna and Helsinki, premiered at the Durban International Film festival in 2010 and its installation form *Motions in Cities* was exhibited at Goethe on Main in September 2012. The installation *Itchy City* was part of the exhibition *Afropolis: City, Media, Art* in Cologne, Germany, from 2010 to 2011.

Her short film *We Remember Differently* (2005) was acquired for M-Net's African Film Library initiative. Her long format film *I Like What I Like* (2006), the film version of Kgafela oa Mogogodi's stage success has met with high praise at both domestic and international festivals.

Jyoti Mistry has published widely on the topics of multiculturalism, identity politics, race and memory.

## Mieke Bernink

After studying psychology and philosophy Mieke Bernink bade farewell to the academic world and her PhD position to become chief editor of the Dutch film and visual culture magazine *Skrien*, a position she held from 1991 to 1999. In her work as a film critic and essayist for this magazine and other publications she continued to explore her interests in aesthetics, film, body, language and feminism. Bernink edited the second edition of the BFI publication *The Cinema Book* (1999) and a book of photographs and texts by Dutch documentary filmmaker Johan van der Keuken (*Bewogen beelden*, 2001). She also authored a monograph on the pioneer of Dutch fiction film, Fons Rademakers (*Fons Rademakers - scènes uit leven en werk*, 2003). From 2001 Bernink was Netherlands Council for Culture's Secretary of Film and Media Education, in which role she contributed to the development of governmental film policy, until in 2008 she was asked to set up a master's programme at the Netherlands Film Academy. This international programme focusing on artistic research in and through cinema offers a select group of professionals space and time to develop and innovate their artistic practice through research, experiment and exchange. As the academy's head of research, Bernink is also responsible for developing its general research strategy, with its focus on the relevance of research for film education.



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In 2016 and 2017, South African filmmaker, visual artist and film theorist Jyoti Mistry was the Artist in Residence at the Netherlands Film Academy's research group and master's programme.

The Amsterdam University of the Arts invites the Artist in Residence to inspire students and teachers by confronting them with topical developments and issues from arts practice.

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