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Redirecting the gaze: Film education in an individualistic era

ABSTRACT

This article offers consideration to an alternative use of film practice and the role of pedagogy in challenging the conception of film as a product and entertainment medium. Instead the authors reflect on the potential of the camera as a tool for facilitating dialogue with communities and individuals, which allows student film-makers to draw on images and representations that challenge the stereotyped and repetitive images generated in mass media. Furthermore, they draw from their own experiences of working with the visual practice (VP) model where the camera is a research tool. As a tool, the camera is used to explore issues in contemporary society and is related to contextual responsibilities and concerns regarding film pedagogy and its connection to enabling social change, with a broader correlation to civil society that aims to promote democratic rights.

PEDAGOGIC ETHOS

In film education at Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg (Sweden) the subject of film is characterized by the image with the entry or start point being the 'original' moving image that appears in a camera obscura. With technological mastery and the ability to capture, preserve and reproduce the image appearing in the camera obscura, humans have been able to see images of themselves. These images though have had consequences in that

they have shaped and impacted how we have represented the world, how we represent ourselves and how we represent others, or increasingly more apparent is the issue of controlling and determining the image-making of the other.

The pedagogic ethos that informs film education at Valand Academy in Gothenburg is the students' own will and their individual desire to study something that is important to them. In this sense there is a strong socio-political commitment to film education that positions the camera as a tool. Furthermore, Film is considered an artistic practice and the camera is a vital tool for forging social development and affecting political change.

The aim is to experiment and explore methods that will allow the camera to be used as a tool for seeing, fostering increased interest in democratic values among film students and not just to define the camera as an instrument for singularly 'entertainment' purposes. When talking about images in the film education approach, as well as in this article, the emphasis is in the moment(s) the camera saves or captures the image, irrespective of whether the outcome is still or moving images. Most cameras today allow for the recording of both still and moving images and therefore the pedagogic approach does not differentiate between still or moving images even though the final result of the students' work is moving images – filmmaking. Still images are integrated in the process of filmmaking, and when included in the process as a way to unpack how images are contextualized, the meanings that are generated from the context and their interpretations can be revealed. Rather than describing the images as an art form or photography, instead 'images' (still and moving) is about the emphasis on the content (and context) of image-making and unearthing its attendant meanings in the context of its production. The first part of the article concerns itself with an exemplification of what it means to define the cameras as a tool. Next the article illustrates how we come to harness this approach through visual practice (VP) as a research and pedagogic model.

Film writer Cesare Zavattini imagined a time when cameras would be small and cheap and could be accessible and used by every citizen in any society (1977: 161). Zavattini saw this as a democratic possibility – that the camera could be a democratic tool for the expression and aspiration towards social justice and in advancing democratic values. It was evident that the camera could be a pervasive tool in our everyday life, and today everyone who has a smartphone also has a camera with the added advantage of publishing software (as a tool or application). The smartphones carry enormous possibilities for image making and the reproduction of images. But it remains to be seen what the possibilities and the potential of this might be for advancing social justice.

Valand Academy is a comparatively young film school that started in 1997. The school's programme has its roots in Zavattini's thoughts about social justice, and is also influenced by the 1960s French New Wave, with its strong focus on the auteur film-maker. The auteur film-maker in this context is often described as the independent, personal film-maker who controls the production from its inception to its distribution. But it is a heritage and image of the filmmaker that contemporary teachers at Valand Academy struggle with, since this image resembles the idea of the lonesome, white, male artist. This romantic, somewhat old-fashioned idea combined with the super-individualistic ideal of life and politics today is not always a fortunate combination in terms of filmmaking. The personal point of view is often interpreted as a 'private

point of view'. As film educators, the challenge is finding methods to redirect the gaze towards the surrounding world (the immediate outer world of the filmmaker rather than an introspective view of the world), and to suggest that the personal is also about the film-maker's seeing of the world and their interpretation of the world. Self-reflection is an important instrument that informs the film-maker's ethics, which shapes their individual perspective and in turn fosters their own unique point-of-view and 'voice' as filmmakers.

This article in addition is an opportunity to reflect on how as teachers, together with the students at Valand Academy, we have started to reconsider the parameters of film education and to develop a curriculum that addresses research and practical methods to problematize social justice issues, and to further see the instrument of film as a way to advance democracy in society. To this end, as part of the film programme, the development of exchange programmes with other film schools serves to explore how this method (VP Model) and approach might be translated and adapted to different sociopolitical and historical circumstances. One of the experiences reflected in this article draws from an exchange programme with the film and television programme at Wits School of Arts in Johannesburg (South Africa) where some of these ideas have been translated and interpreted through a collaborative project.

The project is called VP Model and it serves to offer a decolonializing approach to the more canonized forms of film education (training) curriculum. The approach invites for a wholly new and innovative form of bringing film practice and pedagogy in relation to the sociocultural issues of migration and global displacements of communities. This approach further promotes 'unlearning' conventions of filmmaking that have been canonized through film training institutions that have put vocational training/skills used for storytelling at the centre of film education. In our researcher Ingela Romares' (forthcoming) work, she identifies the driving force of the conventional way of storytelling filmmaking in the question: 'What is going to happen next?' As an alternative for the filmmaking story-convention, Ingela Romare suggests another question: 'What does it really look like'? when a filmmaker works with a certain content (Romare forthcoming). One experience from teaching is that the question 'what does it really look like?' leads to another process, another exploration of aesthetics and ethics than using the framing question of storytelling, which is the 'what is going to happen next?' trope that determines narrative plot and the character arc.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VP MODEL

As a former citizen behind the iron curtain in Poland, where the government controlled and regulated the production and distribution of images, Krzysztof Kieslowski says in an interview for Danish television, 'It's hard to live in a world lacking description. It cannot be understood if one didn't live in a not-described world. It is as if you lived without identity' (Wierzbicki 1995). This sentiment is one that informs the pedagogic approach at Valand Academy and is further developed through the VP model. Being a Swedish film-maker in 2017, it might be hard to understand and recognize the sentiment expressed by Kieslowski, as mass-produced images are constantly cuing a 'depiction' of the world, and thus the 'un-depicted world' appears mythical.

With the overproduction of different kinds of images in various media, it may even be argued that it is difficult to live in a wrongly described

world – given the overproduction of images. Despite the mass-production of images in the general media surrounding us in society, the images produced are similar; their depictions are similar in the sense of the values and 'reproduction of the conventions' depicted. Using the dramaturgy of storytelling the majority of images try to sell something no matter if it is products or news reporting. Therefore the images produce very similar ideals and perspectives with clear ideological persuasion.

The philosopher Bernard Stiegler (2004) is interested in how technique affects the human mind and argues that what one sees in images, still or moving, becomes experiences, which then become part of our memories and perception of the world. Especially moving images affect us so directly that the memories become as strong as our own first-hand experiences. Film theorist Trond Lundemo writes on Stiegler's thoughts,

> The moving image technique constitutes the very basis of our perception of reality, and our recollection is so much shaped by mediated events it no longer exists as an absolute dividing line in our memory between our own experiences and what we have seen on television or the movies. The recall of events where we have never attended but has been brought to us through media – make up most of our memories.
>
> (2004: 24)

Stiegler stresses the importance to 'begin to understand the specificity and the force of cinema, how it can transform life, for example by getting the whole world to adopt the American way of life' (1998: 72). It is important to understand cinema, not just as an artform, or form of entertainment, but with Stieglers' words, as the 'industrialization of memory'.

The ideas proposed by Stiegler suggest that films reproduce values, norms and ideals, and determine how humans behave towards each other depending on appearance (race, class, gender) and the stereotypes that the construction of those values and identities elicit. By drawing from our memories – not only our individual memories but from our collective memories influenced by media – humans engage in storytelling

One of the questions in dealing with film pedagogic transformation with regard to image making is that film students often draw inspiration from other films and television series already made (existing films as references), which themselves are part of the value system that requires a counter position in the teaching programme. Cinema should not be the single reference to make cinema; instead the students are encouraged to look at life itself and actually see, look, observe and depict what is observed in a more directed way.

Film writer Cesare Zavattini (1977: 159) talks about the images from the entertainment industry in cinema. He expresses his concern that film audience are pacified and lose their sense of responsibility to society when they see images of glorified heroes on the screen, especially when there is a huge gap between the images seen and their relation to one's own everyday life. Zavattini encouraged filmmakers to look around and find the interesting themes close to peoples' everyday lives – in other words, to identify the everyday problems and lift them as phenomenas worthy of being exposed as cinema. As an example he refers to *Bicycle Thief* (De Sica, 1948), which mirrors the struggle for survival in difficult times in post-war Italy. If cinema is used as the main reference point in making cinema, there is a danger of mimicking

themes and repetition in the way human experience is depicted. Hence there is a reduced space for both innovation and imagination since much of the content is generated referentially through existing film content.

The Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gives a TED talk titled 'The danger of a single story' (2009). When she was a child she only read books with white people eating apples in the snow. When she started writing herself at an early age, these narratives from 'elsewhere' continued in her stories even though her life in Nigeria was very different from the stories she read and the stories she wrote. When translating this to the context of cinema, there are challenges with finding alternative narratives and themes: if filmmakers are not exposed to alternative perspectives on-screen, the inspiration that is drawn from and for filmmaking remains narrow and informed by repetition and mimicry.

As educators in film practice and filmmaking, an alternative pedagogic starting point could be posing the question, 'what images and perspectives are lacking?' The joint work with students aims to identify those images and perspectives that are not readily available in society; those images that are not part of the over-production of images that serves a capitalistic perspective. Through the teaching programme, ways to express alternative perspectives are invented.

One of the ways to redirect the gaze in teaching is by reconsidering film, not as a product for sale, but 'film' rather as a method of researching the world that surrounds the filmmaker. The camera is seen as a tool, as a research instrument that allows one a better understanding of the world. Film is viewed as a method to identify those perspectives and points of view that are lacking. To clarify, art and its relation to film need to be (re)defined. This is the starting point from which the method is deployed.

> Art is not entertainment and artefacts.
> Art is a practice.
> Film is neither entertainment nor a product.
> Film is a practice.
> The practice of film is the ability to see and depict.
> The camera is a tool to visualize our existence and to convey human experience.

CHANGING THE APPROACH: METHOD

At the film department at Valand Academy, a research project called 'VP Model' is evolving from the method teachers have been experimenting with and developing together with students. The core idea of the project is built on the simple principle that the camera is introduced as a tool to people who do not usually have control over how their lives are described or represented visually in society – in other words, people who are visually represented but do not have 'control' over those representations and images. For example, children 1–5 years old who are often photographed but seldom make images or take pictures from their perspective, newly arrived refugees who do not speak Swedish, and elderly people who want to become familiar with digital technology. They each get to use a camera and decide when, where, what and how they want to use it. The following question is asked: 'What do you want to show me?' Their response is in the form of images (still or moving).[1]

Below is a list of some compelling examples to a series of simple interrogative questions with their responses in image form.

Figure 1: This makes me happy 1*, 2012. Digital image. View from horseback.* © *Anonymous informant.*

A 5-year old girl's response to the question 'What makes you happy?'

Figure 2: This makes me happy 2*, 2014. Digital image. Public toilet.* © *Anonymous informant.*

An old woman in Gothenburg's response to the question 'what makes you happy?' was an image of a public toilet. Her explanation was, 'Thanks to knowing that I can reach a free and clean toilet when I need it in a public space, I dare to go outside and take part in the city I live in'.
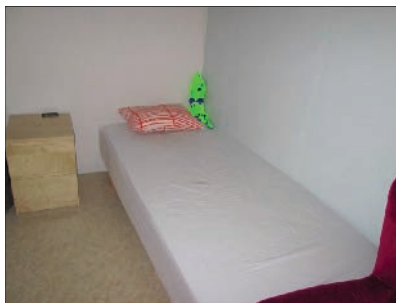

Figure 3: This makes me happy 3*, 2015. Digital image. A bedroom.* © *Anonymous informant.*

Where most people see an empty room, a simple hostel room, the boy who took the picture, who had recently arrived in Sweden alone as a refugee

explained: 'This is my bed. Here I can sleep safely at night for the first time in a very long time. I even have a toy'. This was his image response to the question: 'What makes you happy?'

The collective dialogue around the images is essential. Drawing from Jaques Rancière's (2011) pedagogical approach, the participant and student become directors of his or her own learning guided by a set of leading questions shaped by the pedagogue/researcher.

> These leading questions expressed plainly,
> 'What do you see?
> How do you reflect on what you see?
> How do you relate to what you see in a wider perspective?'
>
> (Rancière 2011: 34)

Figure 4: Alex Afshar, Ipads *, 2016. Digital photo. Göteborg. © Alex Afshar.*

In the group discussions it becomes evident that the considerations that lead up to the photographs are not only aesthetic but also ethical and philosophical. Through the discussion process it becomes apparent that different people answer differently to the questions through the images; they appreciate different things and they see different things. Furthermore, when they start talking with one another they notice that they think differently about what they see, even if they see the same picture. The discussions are often considered the initializing event and multiple understandings and references of the images are produced through this process.

For the teachers and students the images from the participants become the inciting or initiating material from which to recognize those images that are 'lacking', and this process allows for the immediate recognition of alternative perspectives. The material often awakens new questions, and new themes begin to unfold through the process. The images are brought back to the film school and the film students allow time to respond in different ways.

The VP model is a two-fold process: The informants learn about the aesthetics, ethics and technique. The film students encounter different perspectives and enter into a visual dialogue when forming a response.

In our teacher and student exchange programme with the film and television division at Wits School of Arts (University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg), our South African colleagues explored the VP model and took this method further. The students identified persons in a subculture that was of interest to them and introduced the camera with a set of leading questions. The students received answers through images to their questions.

The first part of the exercise is called 'reversing the gaze', wherein cameras are offered to participants who take pictures as the responses to questions

posed by the film students. The second part of the exercise 'returning the gaze' requires that students engage with their own expectations with regard to the 'response-images' they receive from the participants. The instruction given to the students is as follows:

> To complement the material you have 'sourced' from the participants and consider how you [the student] might stage a response to the material provided by your subject. This response is a reaction to the images, narratives/stories or experiences that your subject [the student's subject] has recounted through their 'telling' [showing] when you have posed the question 'show me something'. Your section on returning the gaze should provide an interpretation of the material.[2]

The brief also included an instruction to students to clearly reflect their point of view in their interpretation of the image-responses that they had received as the 'source' material from the participants. When the students present their work all the filmmaking considerations in the practice of filmmaking come to the fore: issues of aesthetics, ethics, technical competencies and subject or thematic choices (for example). It also brings to the fore immediately the students' own perspective when they encounter the participants in relation to the perspective and point-of-view of their subject.

Film and images have been appropriated in many disciplines: anthropology (visual ethnography), medicine, social justice and human rights programmes, as well as in numerous fields in the social sciences where its primary use is as an instrument to document: as a technique for recording as opposed to a method of interrogation. In other words, film and images are principally seen as record (as document – as opposed to documentary) rather than recognizing its method, as a mode and a form that is capable of determining meaning in and of itself. It has the structure for creating meaning through form, not just as a vehicle for content. Films have functioned to explore and document communities but film has had limited consideration as a tool or instrument of investigation where the medium (its form) is used as a visual tool to bridge cultural, communication and linguistic challenges.

Many researchers use cameras and images to get information or data from their informants, but the use of the camera in the VP model takes it further. The images and what the informants say about the images become the data or source for further exploration and examination. The students interpret the data and through their own practice make visible their personal interpretation of the material using the filmmaking tools of editing, rhythm, voice-over, filmed material, music and so on but maintain their consideration for the ethics of informant and the film-maker practice as well.

The method of introducing the camera to informants is similar to reflexive photography and respondent-generated image production, which 'provides a means for informants to have increased voice and authority in interpreting their own lives, social contexts, and a "perspective of action" that helps make their life-views and social systems meaningful to outsiders' (Lapenta 2011: 11). The photographs taken 'allow people to "view" themselves from a distance, outside their everyday lives. This distance enables informants to interpret the selected photographs and perhaps "see familiar data in unfamiliar ways"' (Lapenta 2011: 11). Cala Coats, professor in art education, has researched 'the potential of the photographic act as affirmative encounter – a reflexive, embodied, and relational

community engagement that may activate new ways of seeing our everyday environment' (2014: 4). The image itself is not important for Coats; the image becomes a by-product and instead she discusses 'shifts that pushed the function of photography from representational practice to an embodied and performative approach to community engagement' (Coats 2014: 4). As in the work and teaching with the VP model, the camera becomes a tool for exploration and learning about oneself, the world one inhabits and a tool for inventing new ways of reflecting upon the world.

The VP model builds on another established research method – Photovoice, originally named Photo Novella, which is very similar to the first part of the VP model, the work with informants outside the academy.

> Photovoice is a participatory action research approach that asks interviewees to take photographs that they feel portray their daily routines, common events or community life. They subsequently talk about the significance and meaning of these images with other members of the community and the researcher.
>
> (Lapenta 2011: 5)

The researcher Caroline Wang, one of the founders of Photovoice and who is responsible for developing the project as a method, defines some overarching goals. 'Photovoice has three main goals: to enable people to (1) record and represent their everyday realities; (2) promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community strengths and concerns; and (3) reach policy-makers' (Wang 2010: 148).

An interesting example of how this method translates to social justice occurred while working with one of our informants, an old man named Arnold Håkansson. He was asked to show, through an image-response, what he wished to change in his neighbourhood. He made a short film sequence where he shows himself walking the route from his home to the supermarket. It is a route that requires him to walk up a steep hill. He explained that it would be wonderful to have a bench in the middle of the hill, where he and other old people could have a rest on their way up, when carrying shopping bags. He sent the film to the municipality office and shortly after he received a letter from the municipality confirming their decision to place a bench in the middle of the hill.[3]

The Photovoice method is useful as a starting point to build on, in working with informants outside the academy. The material and experience that comes out of the work with informants is then brought in to the academy. The students and teachers then use artistic interpretation and process the material further through filmmaking practices. The interpretation of the material then changes when addressing the informants' backstories and narratives that accompany those images.

THE THEORETICAL THREAD

The Photovoice approach builds on the pedagogical thoughts of Paolo Freire (1976) and his work constitutes the theoretical connection with the VP model. The main focus is on Freire's (1976) work against illiteracy in Brazil in the 1950s when only the literate part of the population was allowed to vote in the political elections. More than half the adult population could not read and therefore were not eligible to vote. Illiteracy was therefore a problem directly

related to democratic rights. Paolo Freire (1976) developed a set of pedagogics aiming at adults to quickly develop reading and writing skills, which also included political training in order to develop political awareness. The pedagogy further contained knowledge about political processes.

Today literacy, as in reading and writing, is part of the unquestionable democratic rights worldwide where the right to education is viewed and defined as one of the key aspects of human rights. And images are becoming the primary tool for communication. It is thus essential to be able to use the camera and see and understand images, to critically meet and absorb different types of visual information and to form an opinion. In the VP-model we suggest visual literacy as a democratic right, equal to reading and writing.

But how do you teach-learn visual literacy especially in the context of film programmes, which also implies unlearning visual literacies that have become naturalized and are produced as conventions through mass media? It is through using the camera as a tool for research and creating images of issues that concern you (the student). After using the camera and learning how to visualize one's own perspective, the VP model-methodology facilitates a revised relation to the images one has consumed (images seen on television, in the cinema and through the Internet platforms).

In 2016 the teachers at Valand Academy developed a theoretical framework for practical film pedagogy, starting with the camera. The premise was to draw on the analogy of reading and writing: when you learn to read and write you start with the alphabet. Hence the following questions were posed: When you start to learn filmmaking, what would the filmmaking alphabet look like? Where and what would be its starting points? What would the letters be? We presented a suggestion of what the film practice alphabet for the VP model would be; a number of exercises, where every letter in the alphabet is a practical exercise with the camera.[4] The letter A is about technique (what camera are you using?); the letter B is about ethics (how will you meet the world through a camera?); the letter C is about method; and the letter D is about the research question ('distance'). The exercise connected to letter D is to choose an object and take three pictures of it from three different distances. The first picture would be very close (literally). The camera will be just 1 centimetre from the object. The second image would be at a distance where you see the whole object in the frame of the camera. The third picture would be an image of the object from a much larger (further) distance.

Figure 5: Nina Persson, Bathroom 1*, 2014. Digital photo. Göteborg. © Nina Persson.*

This picture is taken from a very close distance. It is possible to guess what the object in the picture is, but it is difficult to be sure.

Figure 6: Nina Persson, Bathroom 2*, 2014. Digital photo. Göteborg. © Nina Persson.*

This is a picture of the same object, taken from a distance greater than 1cm. It becomes clearer what the object is. But the size and its relation to other objects is still not fully evident. A child would say that the pink figure is very big, since it is big in the frame of the image. Most adults think it is around twenty centimetres high through the objects around it and the scale of the image.

Figure 7: Nina Persson, Bathroom 3*, 2014. Digital photo. Göteborg. © Nina Persson.*

When the camera is further away, it is then possible to understand the size of the pink figure since we see its scale (size) in relation to other objects and its context, also in relation to other objects that we are familiar with.

This concept of distance appears very simple, almost banal, but it is a fundamental aspect to understanding how the camera and photographed images work. It is also a fundamental aspect if a person (student filmmakers) requires an understanding of how to 'read' images.

Another example that might clarify the issue of understanding scale (size) with images is through children's literacy and its pictorial representation. When children are developing their vocabulary and references to the real world through picture books, adults might sit down with them and look through books filled with pictures. 'This is a cow', the adult might say and point at an image of a cow. 'This is a rabbit'.

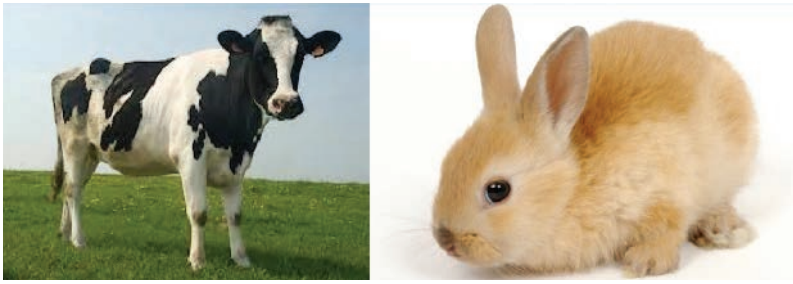The images might be no different from those shown below:

Figure 8: Klara Björk & Stefan Jensen, Cow and Rabbit 1, *2017. Digital photo. Göteborg. © Klara Björk & Stefan Jensen.*

This was the arrangement of these images when two small boys (aged two years) looked at them when learning about the animals. The first encounter with the animals was through images before they encountered the animals in the real world. What did they learn from the images? First of all, they learnt what the animals look like. When the mother took the boys to the countryside to see the real animals, something very interesting happened. Both boys were very impressed by the cow. Imagine the two small boys standing close to this enormous animal. Shortly after they went to see the rabbit and the boys were very disappointed. Why? From the images above, they had not only learnt what the animals looked like, but also that the animals were of the same size. First, the boys saw the cow, and then they expected that the rabbit would be as large as the cow based on the scale of the animals in the images. Their expectations clashed with reality when the rabbit was significantly smaller in relation to their expectations when seen alongside the scaled images of the cow. Imagine a rabbit the size of a cow and then imagine the disappointment the boys felt, when the rabbit was so much smaller than they expected.

A person with camera practice will understand that the image of the rabbit does not have a reference inside it, and can therefore be more critical with this kind of image and perhaps be able to imagine that the relation between the two objects might be as this:

Figure 9: Klara Björk & Stefan Jensen, Cow and Rabbit 2, *2017. Digital photo. Göteborg. © Klara Björk & Stefan Jensen.*

In reality, for most of us the first-hand experiences of specific phenomena such as a first kiss, sex, a court trial, death, war or a medical emergency situation usually comes from experiencing it through films or television long before an encounter with the same phenomena in real life occurs. Bachen and Illouz (1996) interviewed young people about where they encounter stories of romance; 90% of those interviewed said that they learn about romance from movies, 94% from television programming and only 33% hear stories of romance from their mothers while 17% from their fathers (Bachen and Illouz 1996: 292). Young people learn about romantic love from television and cinema, and what they learn might create expectations on their everyday life, as the sociological researcher Bjarne M. Holmes (2007) found when he studied romance-oriented media and beliefs in the destiny of romantic relationships. In his studies, Holmes found an association between preference for/like of romance-oriented media and, second, relationship-as-destiny-oriented beliefs, belief in pre-destined soulmates and that 'mind reading' is expected in relationships. He argues that romantic comedies present a view on love that does not correspond to love relations in real life. What Holmes (2007) reveals in his research is therefore in line with Stiegler's (2004) analysis (as described earlier in the text) – what is seen in films guides viewer expectations of how reality should be rather than our own perception of reality. This applies not only to love, but also to everything we encounter in film narratives. If this is true, it becomes dangerous with a one-sided portrayal of human experience. The film education at Valand Academy builds on the awareness of the impact of mass-produced and canonized images and promotes the responsibility that comes with using a camera to produce images that get exposed to a wider audience.

WORKING TOWARDS SOME RESULTS

The aim of this approach is to consider how to teach film practice(s) in a way that radicalizes the curriculum so that it functions to change the pedagogic forms or strategies that are not simply about filmmaking but also a practice that have a direct relation to social justice issues built into the curriculum. The work is necessary not only as a way of developing awareness and increased knowledge about diverse global issues through the process of using the camera as a tool of sociopolitical investigation, but also to develop awareness of the impact of the image itself.

One of the observations in the work with the film students through the VP model is that they build self-awareness of their own seeing and in turn develop critical thinking (and practice) in image making. The reflexive approach allows for a reassessment of the conventions of image making, as well as addressing the normative and colonial world-view that images reproduce. The educational form enables the students to develop a fresh gaze and a new approach to the surrounding world and their own artistic practice and their creativity in developing images and points-of-view.

In the work with the informants it becomes clear that using the camera as a tool has potential on many levels. When the students worked in a pre-school environment and handed cameras to small children (ages 1–5 years old) their own filmmaking practices aesthetically were challenged and changed through the questioning of what constitutes 'the image' itself. They (the student filmmakers) found that the children's way to film is close to what the digital technology offers, namely, to use the camera as a pen. The pen is potentially a very personal tool used in many different ways: to write and to draw, to save a

5. Elis Johansson Hammar, a five year old boy, films when he plays catch and run with his friend. He holds the camera in his hand instead of in front of his eyes: https://vimeo.com/16949678.

thought or an impression. The digital camera is an instrument that invites a similar approach, a direct action in the moment. The film students were provoked and challenged by the young informants to re-think the conventions of cinema.

One of the observations made was that the use of the camera was not a given. The children did not take it for granted as a tool through which to look through. For the children the camera was more often part of a bodily experience, for example, when a boy was chased by a friend.[5] It is difficult to move quickly with the camera in front of the eyes, and the boy improvised with the camera in his hands (as an extension of their hand rather than the eye at the eye-piece) rather than looking through the lens while running. The researcher Erica Cavin observed a similar way of addressing the camera with 2-year-old Emma in her study, which puzzled her:

> Emma's picture taking posed serious problems for me, in that for all my attempts to put aside my taken-for-granted knowledge, it was very difficult for me to fully acknowledge what Emma was doing as 'picture taking'. As I observed her production of photographs, part of me kept waiting for her to see that there was something wrong with her pictures and to ask for help. Her apparent satisfaction with her use of the camera as picture-producing- object both fascinated and puzzled me, as can be seen in our interactions.
>
> (1994: 40)

Cavin notes that the little girl Emma did not look once in the viewer finder of the camera when she used the camera. In the VP-model there have been very similar observations made: the use of the camera challenges the norms of film practice and creates a vibrant discussion not only regarding ethics, but also the aesthetics of filmmaking.

One on-going project is a student interested in working with grief and mourning amongst elderly people. One informant, an old woman, 90 years of age, used the camera for self-reflection during a period of grief but got so attached to the camera that she kept on using it in her everyday life as a visual diary and did so for the last five years until she passed away. She collected images, memories and saw it as handing-over an archive to the coming generations. The film student worked alongside the old woman informant and took care of the archive she left behind.

One of the most urgent situations in Sweden since two years back is the welcoming of refugees from warzones close to European borders. In 2015, close to 163,000 people applied for asylum in Sweden (Swedish Migration Agency Official Website 2017). The total population of Sweden today is ten million. The newly arrived immigrant children have the pressures of learning the Swedish language in order to integrate into the school system. The loss of a spoken language, when learning a new one, is also to some degree a loss of identity. We have explored working with the camera as a way to focus on issues of identity with the immigrant children. We have introduced cameras and asked a set of questions: what do you like/dislike? What are you good at, what is your special skill? What does your everyday environment look like? What are you afraid of/when are you brave? What do you dream of, what have you never tried before? The children answer with an image and a spoken reflection in their native language. The material was then edited into a film sequence, with Swedish subtitles, and the children use it as a presentation

when they enter school.[6] The work was done with simple tools and simple ideas to enable teachers and children to adopt the tools and the methods to integrate into their new social milieu.

One of the students in the film programme, originally a refugee from Kurdistan/Northern Iraq himself, brought the VP model to a big refugee camp in the area where he originally came from. His approach was to offer the camera as a tool for empowering kids and to contribute to the distribution of a more diverse set of images from a refugee camp, images taken by the children themselves. The outcome of the project were multi-perspectival exhibitions, screenings and film projects led by both informants and the film student with the aim of adding children's view on their own life situation in a refugee camp.

One additional theme that the film students themselves have identified in the work with the VP model is the idea of the urban norm that segregates contemporary Swedish society. The students posed the following questions: Who is depicting the rural areas and what images reproduce the myths (prejudices) about rural areas in the main-stream media?

EDUCATION VERSUS CULTIVATION

We all live in a visual culture. Images are central to our way of communicating. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the following is listed under Article 26: – The right to education.

'Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory' (United Nations Official Website 2017).

On the Swedish government's website on Human Rights is the following declaration: 'School is essential for a person to know and be able to assert their human rights. Those who can read, write and count can take on different types of information and themselves form an opinion' (Regeringens webbplats om mänskliga rättigheter ['the Swedish government's official website on human rights') 2017). It is essential also that 'the image' should be included in basic education. The ability to film and communicate with images and to read and critically relate to and with images in current society is central to education and not simply a matter of visual literacies. It is a competence so essential in contemporary society that it should be a part of the basic education foundation given at school.

To raise visual literacy amongst all citizens will not only diversify the community of professional film-makers and have longer-term impact towards cultivating audiences and 'readers' of images (as opposed to consumers of images). It is a matter of Education vs Cultivation. According to the Swedish national cultural policy objectives, cultivation comprises a set of knowledge, values, norms and ideals. Whereas education often aims to provide a person with occupational competence; the purpose of cultivation is to provide orientation in life and the world.

In the current global climate, the tenets of democracy and human rights are being threatened and compromised by economic drivers and the reconstitution of sovereign states.

Given the increasing demand for teaching institutions to create more inclusive curriculum that captures the diversity of their civil societies, the objective must be to foster a place for inclusive learning and teaching experiences that embrace diversity as a pedagogic opportunity. It means addressing a question of feminist pedagogic practices, de-colonial approaches to

teaching-learning and including minority and marginal communities in the teaching curriculum – this is what it means to both transform the curriculum and create a context of learning and teaching that is multi-perspectival with and in an inclusive environment.

In a world that increasingly bases its whole value system on financially measurable goals, where humans are increasingly measured as human capital, the role in education is to ensure that there are other social and political values that inform social structures. Artistic practice is a method towards expressing these counter-capital ideas and values. To cultivate the ability for VP across the social spectrum, through alternative forms of image-making practices, students are given the opportunity to develop their potential as holders and practitioners of human rights, facilitating the values of democracy through film as a tool. Artistic practice is to use one's senses when experiencing the world, and then to communicate that unique experience as an expression that can be received by another human being. Visual practise is about being able to use images as the tool for sharing and being able to visualize and share in observations and experiences. All individuals carry unique experiences, a perspective on the world that the camera as a tool makes visible. Through artistic practice with film using the VP model we can share each other's observations, each other's experiences and perspectives.

Film and images inform our values and dreams. How can film educators address that in this present individualistic era? Perhaps a pedagogue like Paolo Freire (1976) remains relevant even today, considering his thinking with regard to democratic values in society. Inspired by Freire, his thinking becomes a tool to pose questions like 'What does the world look like? How would we want it to be?' Freires' (1976) pedagogy provoked knowledge production about the political processes and people in his workshops could ask themselves questions like 'How are you going to act (in terms of responsibility) in order to get the world as you would want it to be?' It is easy to be reactive and react to what the world looks like, instead of acting, starting with one's self, based on how you imagine the possibility for a more equalitarian society. When working through artistic practice, it trains our senses to perceive the world and to form ideas for ourselves about the world, its politics and its possibilities. It allows the student to examine how their ideological reasoning about what it means to be human relates to and can be expressed through their artistic practice.

The question remaining is what role does a film education have today, and how can a film education re-direct the gaze? Where do we look in the future? Can the film school and film students offer something to the world beyond entertainment and prescriptive values? Can the practice of film and the knowledge about artistic working methods provide a revised understanding of the camera as a tool for reclaiming the belief in democratic values?

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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