ifs internationale filmschule köln

GEECT Twin Conference 2019

EMBRACING DIVERSITY IN EUROPEAN FILM SCHOOLS

köln

amsterdam

Netherlands Film Academy GEECT Twin Conference 2019

Summary
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March 6-8 2019

Introduction

In the beginning of the year 2019 the Netherlands Film Academy and the ifs internationale filmschule köln successfully launched a new format within GEECT, a twin conference with the topic "Embracing Diversity in European Film Schools". The design for both conferences was developed in collaboration between both institutions. The first part took place in Amsterdam from January 23-25, the second part in Cologne from March 6-8.

The intellectual and emotional journey, which was initiated in Amsterdam by raising awareness and stimulating sensitivity towards our unconscious bias and stereotypes within audiovisual representation was continued in Cologne. More perspectives and demands regarding increased pluralism in the institutional procedures were added. The Cologne part worked with the same structure as Amsterdam: Two keynotes, four workshops and six best practices from various schools deepened the topic of diversity as a social normality and the explicit need for filmschools to mirror this change in European societies in their faculty, student body, administrative staff and their curricula.

The insights provided via the above mentioned elements at this time clearly surpassed the stage of awareness and became very concrete, at times painful to take in and reflect upon. At the end of the conference in Cologne a package of defined actions was presented, which emerged directly from the collaboration and networking throughout the two conferences. As a consequence diversity and inclusion were in the end, conceived as being only some among other relevant issues, such as participation and transparency. There was a general understanding, that the core of the discussion was circling the concept of the redistribution of power in higher education institutions.

Keynotes

The second part of the GEECT twin conference "Embracing Diversity in European Film Schools" began with a keynote by Dr. Mark Terkessidis who referred to the keynotes in Amsterdam by Elonka Soros and Orwa Nyrabia challenging the audience with his opening remarks by stating that each representative of the participating schools already knew exactly what needs to be done in regards to increasing pluralism in their institutions. He pointed out, that in many other conferences with the same or a similar topic people came with a high motivation and best intentions, but afterwards they just didn't do anything, and as we see nothing has changed.

_ The Curriculum Ahead. Migration, Mobility and a Plan for Multiplicity
by Dr. Mark Terkessidis

In his presentation Terkessidis stated, that it is a necessity for each institution to develop a *Vielheitsplan*, a plan for multiplicity, because diversity has become at large the normality in most European societies – that in fact we are diversity. Living in a post-migrant society is nothing new, and it is more than urgent to take action.

He stated, that there is a long history of migration in Germany, mentioning the "Gastarbeiter", guest-workers mainly coming from Italy, Greece and Turkey in the early sixties of the 20th century after the German government had signed contracts with the Italian, Greek and Turkish governments, because Germany was lacking workforce. Nowadays Germans seem to praise themselves for having opened their borders to 1 Million refugees in 2015. But within the so-called "refugee wave" there were just 900.000, who mainly fled from Syria, Iraq and several countries from the African continent and chose Germany as their new homeland. A number which doesn't seem so exceptional for a country with 80 million inhabitants, if we think of the small Lebanon, who accepted 2 million refugees, mainly from Syria.

Today hostility towards foreigners and racism is on the agenda again. Terkessidis claimed, that we live in a form of liberalism, which is based on indifference. We love to think that we are open, but we are afraid to make mistakes. We talk about people with a *migration background* like a formula, in order to keep the problem at a distance. But if you want to change the language and the system, there will be conflict. He reminded the audience, that pluralism and inclusion is about giving up privileges, which the majority of the white middleclass is still defending. The film schools should be clear about their motivation and their definition of the problem: Do they want to give themselves a better image, do they just want better films or do they really want change? Culture institutions are the most homogeneous spaces in society.

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Terkessidis criticized the application processes of study courses at film-schools for being too in-transparent, because neither the notion of *talent* nor *experience* is clearly defined. Photos in application processes are obsolete, because they can be a source of discrimination. "Make mistakes and make them fast, as opposed to doing nothing" Terkessidis advised in the end of his talk.

In her keynote Sylke Rene Meyer focused on identity as a cultural construction. She elaborated on nomadic cultures before the Neolithic revolution, where gender was not bound to the biological sex. Certain tribes in Bolivia differentiated between ten types of gender based on the biological sex of a person, but also on the sex of their farmland or profession. Women gave birth only every four years and breastfed the child until it was able to walk independently. Whereas in our post-neolithic patriarchal societies men control reproduction by choosing their partner and create legislation on how women were allowed to love, enjoy sexuality or not. Female identity was defined in relation to marriage. Sylke Meyer offered a "tour d'horizon" on the cultural construction of "women" from the Greek theater through the spectacle of representation within the Christian religion until the beginning of the 19th century, when mirrors became available to the average person and with growing individualism our gendered society changed again and women became writers, artists, and protagonists of novel narratives. With the second wave of feminism and postmodern cinema, women began to make films and empower the female gaze to deconstruct the identity ascription of "woman". Women came into some power. The male gaze didn't lose its privilege, but started to receive competition for it.

The loss of privilege causes aggression and fear of castration. In this context S. Meyer paralleled male fragility and white fragility. Like gender, race is a hidden, intentionally invisible narrative to justify an unfair distribution of the surplus product. Being white means to acknowledge my privilege and my racist biases. White is the norm, which is why white people often believe, they are colorblind. For people of color on the other hand, colorblindness is impossible as they are confronted with racial discrimination at every moment of their lives.

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Currently we witness the phallic inclusion of women and queer men into the patriarchal system to protect the privilege of the capitalist classes against the poor. Now women and queer also fear castration. Male and white fragility is a kind of castration anxiety.

Meyer concluded her talk with a series of screen shots from recent TV-movies in German television pointing at their postcolonial attitudes towards "Africa". In these examples black people are portrayed as wild and untouched by culture, black men serve as an erotic projection screen for white women. Realities and cultures of African countries are transformed into an adventure playground, degrading black people as just pure, good, perhaps naïve and behind. Which proves that women can also perform gendered patriarchal discrimination.

These examples are not only representing racial biases, they also illustrate a common manifestation of white privilege: White people think that they can talk about anything. White people think that they can talk about other cultures and ethnicities, because white people think that they know everything. We think of us as "the norm", as humanity per se. White people, when making films about characters with a different class, gender, racial background, often claim that they want to give a voice to underrepresented people. Yet all people have a voice and can speak for themselves. The main reason, why these people are underrepresented is that the privilege of telling the world, how it is, is in the hands of predominantly white heteronormative men.

Finalizing her talk, Meyer expressed her belief that the German movement "Pro Quote Film" will only be truly successful, if it considers all aspects of narrative otherness such as: gender, race, age, education, sexuality, ability and class. We need to understand that equality for women can only be achieved, if we overcome ableist, homophobic, racist and classist discrimination. White

fragility just like male fragility, touches upon the core identity of white male heteronormative supremacy that hurts everyone. Acknowledging privilege puts the privilege in question, and stories themselves may overwrite the myth of the master and inspire action.

Best & Worst Practices

_ Dan Angelo Muggia: Preparatory Program for Arabic-Speaking Students

Dan Angelo Muggia, head of the film department at the Beit Berl College in Israel, initiated the implementation of a preparatory year for Arabic-speaking students at his home institution. Looking back at the two-decade long history of the Beit Berl College he and his colleagues realized that the composition of the student body was dominated by students with a Hebrew background, whereas only a few Arabic students graduated.

Therefore, Dan Muggia and his colleagues set out to change this situation. They planned and realized a year-long course on filmmaking for potential Arabic students. But in the beginning the offer triggered little interest in the targeted community. Only after the team contacted key figures of the Arabic community who spread the word and set up connections, did they receive more positive feedback in the form of applications.

The accepted applicants received introductory courses to film history and theory, learned about filmmaking, and started learning Hebrew and English. If the students decided after the preparatory year to apply for the regular programs at Beit Berl, the factor of language proved to be crucial for their success. Therefore, Arabic-speaking assistants translated during classes taught in Hebrew to ensure that Arabic students were able to learn and participate.

_ An van. Dienderen: The Iceberg Below the Waterline: How to Address the Normativity of "Whiteness" in Film Education?

An van. Dienderen, a lecturer and researcher at KASK School of Arts in Ghent, Belgium, demanded in her presentation that the medium film, itself, as well as its technical preconditions should be analyzed and questioned with regard to their implications to race and gender. The starting point of her artistic and research endeavor was a situation in class during which a white female student was asked to function as the reference key for lighting. Van. Dienderen was left wondering why a white skin complexion is still the undisputed industry standard for keying. And why does it have to be a woman that men stare at through the lenses of their cameras?

Van. Dienderen pointed out in her presentation that all the visual equipment of filmmaking has originally been developed with a general assumption of "whiteness", which, in turn, of course led to film practices based on "whiteness". In other words, normative "whiteness" is embedded in the technologies and practices of filmmaking and consequently film education. As a result, van. Dienderen illustrated that dark-skinned actors in a movie with a predominantly white cast had to apply massive amounts of make-up to lighten their skin tone to somehow match the color chart.

The outcome of her research was integrated into van. Dienderen's short movie "Lili", which focuses on the phenomenon of the so-called China girls – pretty, white women acting as the key for lighting. The latters' only quality is their skin complexion. They do not have to memorize any lines or movements. By sitting motionlessly in front of the camera they allow the camera operators to key all the while looking at her as an object, while at the same time excluding people with darker skin.

_ Jim Hornsby: Diversity Is All Around Us

During his time in the higher education sector UK based producer Jim Hornsby initiated several programs that help(ed) students during the transition phase from education to work life. Presently he acts as the company director of *Runaway Media* which is the successor of his former endeavors, where he works with young filmmakers with mostly diverse backgrounds. The goal of *Runaway Media* is to make short movies for clients from the voluntary or public sector, consequently providing the clients with the needed audiovisual material and the young filmmakers of *Runaway* with samples for their portfolio, which in turn raises their employability. The films that are made by the young filmmakers for said non-profit agencies show according to Hornsby positive examples of inclusion, while at the same time tackling matters of cultural conflict.

_ Ylva Gustavson: The Foundation Course

Ylva Gustavson, a teacher at the Stockholm University of Arts, reported that a year-long foundation course in filmmaking was implemented in the Department of Film and Media. The goal of this course was to make it easier for people from diverse backgrounds to enter the university, which at that time was still very homogenous, despite demographic changes in society.

In the beginning, the course mainly attracted men from an ethnic or working class background. These graduates of the program started to make a name for themselves in the Swedish industry, which not only furthered the aspect of diversity on and off screen but also had positive consequences for the foundation year program. The program now attracts a wider group of diverse people, as can be seen from the rising number of female, ethnic applicants. Another important aspect of the program is the teaching staff. Only lecturers with sensitivity for diversity are hired and during the last few years even graduates of the program have been recruited to complement the teaching staff.

### _ Jan Bulckaen: Studying Audiovisual Arts with an Auditory or Visual Constraint

Jan Bulckaen, a student counselor at RICTS – School of Arts in Belgium, shared his insights on working with students with sensorial limitations within audiovisual study programs. A few years ago a blind student successfully completed her studies in the radio department at RICTS. She had a very outgoing personality and was greatly supported by her classmates and the former student counselor. During examination periods tensions sometimes build up within the group of students, as her classmates were not always able to support her as during regular lecture periods. It, therefore, proved to be important, to stay alert and in close contact with the group to ease said tensions.

Recently, another blind student started studying radio at RICTS. Jan Bulckaen reported that he cannot fully fall back on the experience made with the first blind student. The new student is much more of an introvert, which changes the aspects of group support. In other words, the institution always has to look at individual cases and be open to adapting to different situations with each student with impairments.

_ Niva Ehrlich, Thuy Trang Nguyen, Loreto Quijada: Filling the Gap

Building on the initiative of the NFA students in Amsterdam, the ifs students shared their individual thoughts and experiences with the aspect of diversity ranging from the problems of voicing concerns in an almost homogenous group of students to incidents of discrimination in the classroom. As a consequence, the students demanded that film schools need to be a space of pluralism where all voices can be heard and will be supported – in- and outside the classroom as well as during their project work.

Based on their experiences and on a survey conducted among the ifs students body the students created a magazine asking for an anti-discrimination policy, a person of trust and a safe space within the film school community.
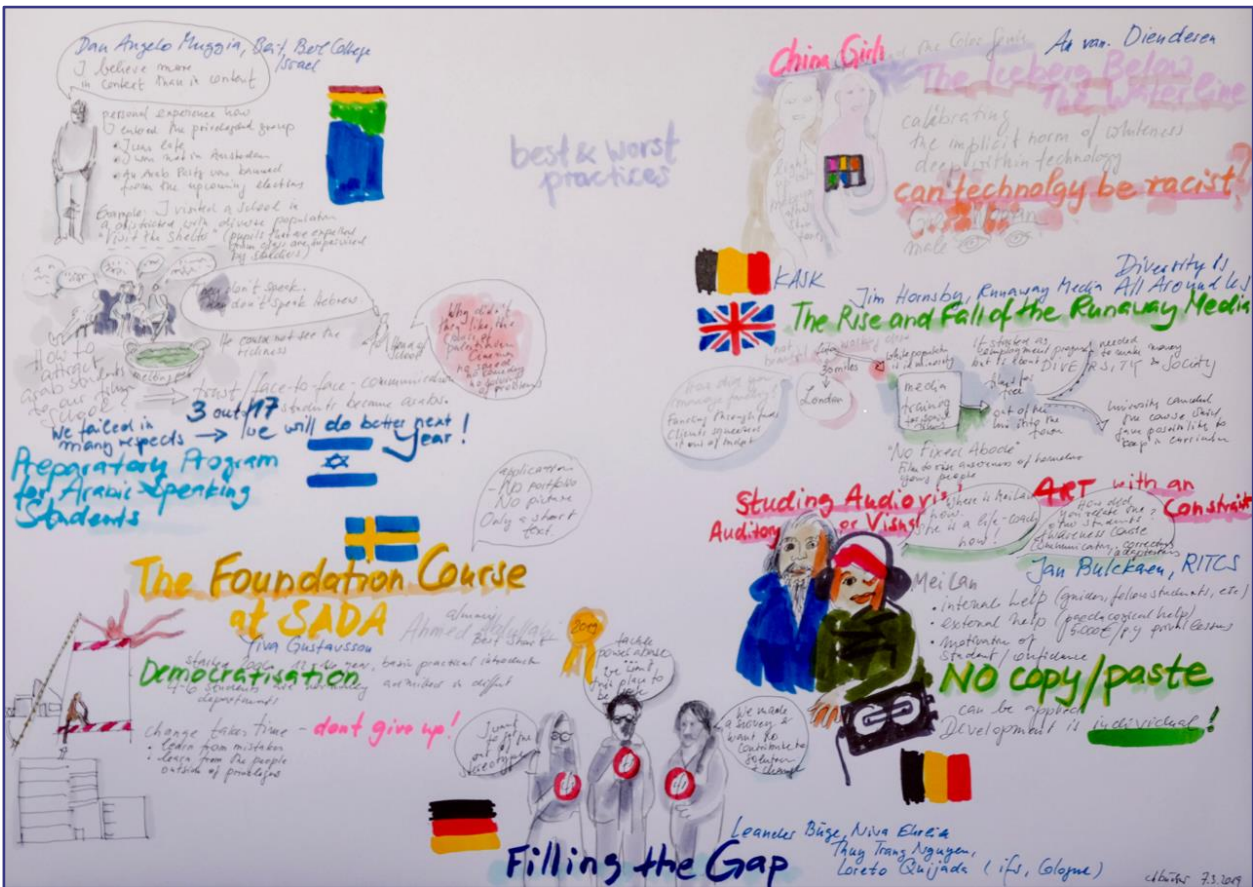
Workshops

_ Paul Tyler: Power and Politics

Building on the work done in Amsterdam the workshops here were based on a hybrid map from the previous conference which represented our film school process in terms of the challenges, and influences facing any individuals going through it, or working in it. The main point of the workshop was to understand the system itself and look for strategies to make it a more diverse community experience.

Strategies:

- Student Ambassadors that go out from the school to various institutions and parts of society, e.g. rural areas.

- Foundation Courses within the film schools – in order to come into contact with those that would otherwise not have had the courage to apply to film school.

- Student Helpers for the Admissions process

- Older Students to help in class with difficult situations

- Show more possibilities in the working world, Indie, Academia, etc.

- Creating networking strategies for those who do not have the privilege that others might enjoy

- A safe space means being able to deal with conflict – with clear methods, intentions….one idea is by pairing up older teachers with younger teachers.

- GEECT could lobby for more funding for further education (LLL) for the industry

- Film schools could make contact with foundation schools for children 7-15 years old to start film education earlier

- Adding a student representative in the jury for new students to help choose new students.

Challenges:

- Funding for better admissions process, ambassadors, resources

- Networking for those who have no existing networks, e. refugees

_ Maxa Zoller: Representation

This workshop encouraged participants to examine and discuss the views towards the question of *Representation* within the context of film and our film school communities. By looking at what we see in our films, and then discussing what these statements meant to each one of the participants, we had access to a multitude of perspectives without fear of judgments. The first group introduced the idea that the distribution of power was more relevant than diversity itself, and therefore the second workshop worked further with this idea relating the issues discussed

as being part of a jigsaw puzzle. Through contemplation, reflection and discourse more transparency and empathy for the views of others was visible.

Some of the important issues, suggestions and strategies talked about were:

- More debate on cultural differences together with people having different backgrounds

- Outreach to rural areas, and poorer communities

- Coaching for students and staff on behavior

- Cultural brokers – as an in-reach strategy, to come into the schools to talk about their realities

- At the next GEECT conference there could be a report about the last one…to keep the conversation going.

- Increased funding for international students

- Encourage peer to peer learning instead of hierarchy learning

As part of the summary of these workshops, Zoller shared with us her process of choosing films for the International Women's Film Festival that she curates. She has three categories of films that she uses; Right friends, False friends and Good friends.

Right friends – these are underrepresented films working in good practice e.g. cast is all black, something that is very rare in Germany, although the film itself may still be quite conventional.

False friends – are films where political correctness maybe the theme or plot of a film, but in fact the making of the film shows bad practice. These problems can be very subtle and so Zoller talked of "invisible traps".

Good friends – are more about the filmmakers themselves, people who come to co-create with the work they do, such as an artist in residence might bring their work to share with others.

Finally, as in Amsterdam, the subject of cultural appropriation was again was a common thread in much of the discussion and a reoccurring theme. – It was therefore suggested to go into more detail on this topic, perhaps at the next GEECT or CILECT conference.

_ **Anna Momber-Heers: Language and Body Language**

As the workshops in Amsterdam concentrated more on the body, and the language of the body, we decided to dedicate this workshop to the issues of verbal language itself, within the film school communities.

In the first group there was a focus on the effects within the system concerning the language we use. Then in the second group the focus turned more toward individuals and the challenges and opportunities we have as such concerning our use of language.

Anna introduced a reverse thinking technique using the question "How can you avoid diversity?" – in the first group when thinking of the system, and then in the second group asking everyone to think as an individual. One of the clear answers to this question was "denial". Following this, suggestions to influence this behavior of denial such as communication trainings were produced in a further brainstorming session. The idea of practical exercises in filmmaking were not only suggested, but also developed further within the group. The consensus in both groups was that more discussion, sharing experiences and looking for solutions, were needed to continue this line of inquisition.

> The main ideas that were talked about which were identified as being essential for change in both the institution and the individual, but especially when thinking of the individual were:

- Listening – here we are reminded of the concept of deep listening which came up in other parts of the conference in Cologne but also in Amsterdam.

- Have courage, be brave – although it sounds so simple, it was recognized that in order to create lasting change, we need to also be able to make mistakes, be uncomfortable and continue to look for new ways to make that change. There is no one recipe or one right way to do things, so we need the courage to look at each situation with new eyes and in a new way.

- Don't be afraid of conflicts – when we talk about "safe spaces", we might be negating the idea of conflicts all together. At the same time we know as film educators that conflict can be an initiator for creativity and a necessity for change. So the notion of embracing a new perception of conflicts was discussed.

- Understanding means sometimes to not shy away from what hurts. It may be necessary to confront a difficult situation in order to push past unconscious bias and re-direct attention going down a destructive path. The recognition was apparent that often situations which are "loaded" or tricky are the important situations for making the desired change.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that during these workshops it became clear that changing the language of a system will definitely include and provoke conflict. This is not to say that it is impossible or not worthwhile, but simply that from the perspective of the individual a large task. It stands then to follow that although changing language habits in individuals was also found to be very challenging it was indeed easier to find strategies for than that of the institution.

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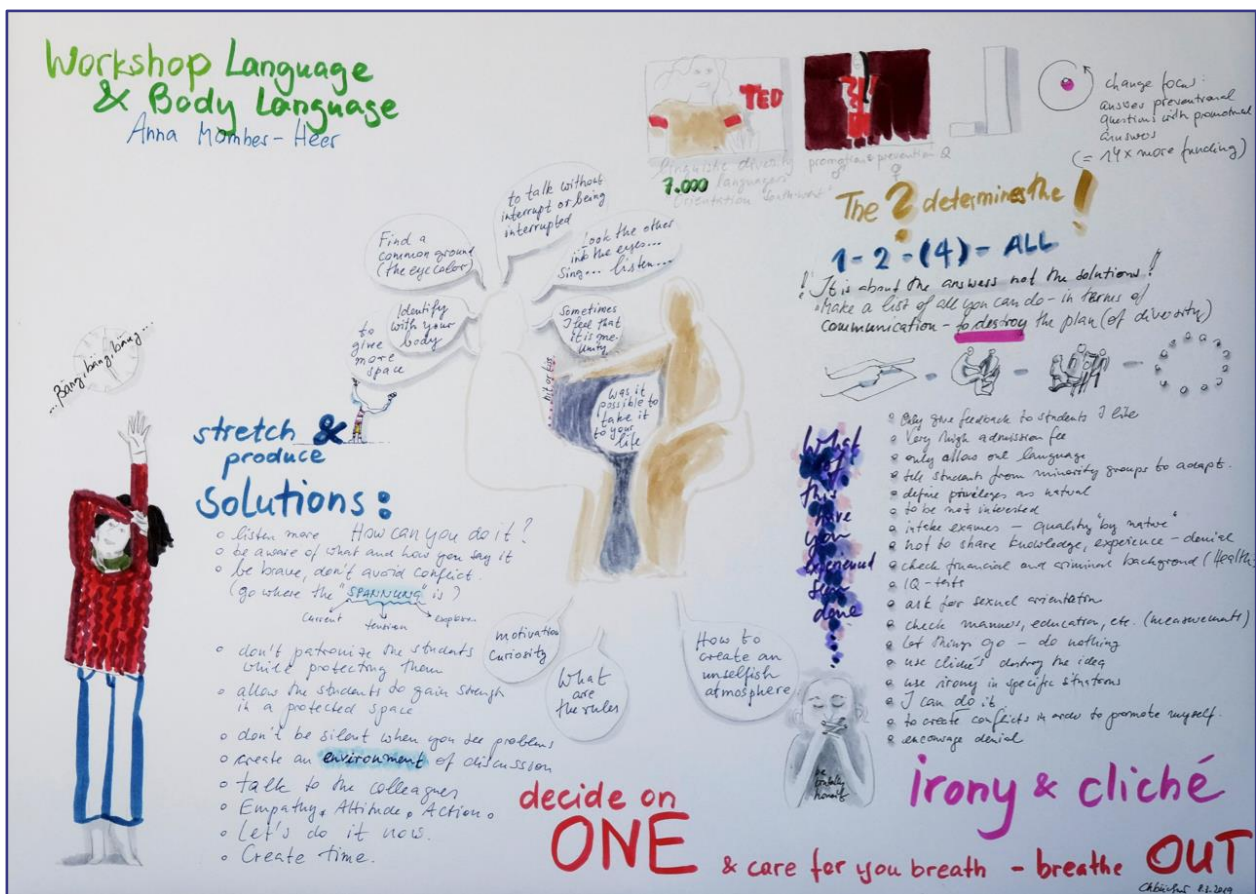
_ **Mieke Bernink and Jyoti Mistry: Canon Expanded**

This workshop built on what was done in Amsterdam, and looked to find and create examples for more exercises and varied concepts of "the film canon" for the future. The purpose of the work done here helped to realize that we are working with an outdated education system that encourages "otherness" and promotes a postcolonial perspective on filmmaking throughout Europe. Starting with the relevance of silence to encourage empathetic listening, the participants were guided in finding new perspectives on the situations they had experienced and teaching they had practiced until now. Participants were invited to examine their receptive habits through a deep listening exercise. In this exercise the participants concentrated on content and aesthetics, consciously disciplining the habit of using taste as a defining aspect in describing a film. Everyone was asked to describe what had happened in the shortfilm they saw – and then summarizing what had been said by the partner. This exercise was an example of a teaching method that encourages everyone to speak and everyone to practice listening. It showed how a classroom can steer those who like to dominate situations, and still make room for those who are too shy to raise their voice.

In discussion it became clear that we need to move away from the traditional notion of a canon to thinking of it in more terms of iteration. In the past the intension of creating a canon was to represent a repository of culturally connotated codes, tastes and traditions. What might be helpful for film educators to consider when creating a canon, is what conceptual theme is to be examined, considered or discussed.

It was agreed upon that that a canon in the traditional sense does not make sense anymore, at least not in the terms we have been talking about it in the past. The groups then suggested the following concepts for creating canons.

9 concepts for themes to work with when deciding what films or related works of art to show and discuss:

- Ghosts
- Readings of History
- Growing (up/old) pains
- Gaze – points of view
- Gender & Sexuality
- Stereotypes
- Altered states of consciousness
- Aesthetics – ethics
- Body and Materiality

It was suggested that the participants assemble relevant films, photography, music, theater pieces, other pieces of art around these themes to use as a conceptual framework. And they were asked to create a proposal for a practical assignment for this theoretical concept.

Finally, the group looked again at the question of silence – What does the silence mean? Is it resistance? A form of power? A form of protection? This also is necessary for understanding the student teacher relationship and for understanding our communities and how they work in order to create safe spaces.

Main Points discussed in Canon Expanded:

- There is a real need to share more between teachers and students.
- A Handbook with exercises, or online list, knowledge map in GEECT community would be helpful.
- A Safe space environment needs to include uncomfortableness, including how to read and deal with silence.
- To talk about curriculum development with students ensures all perspectives in the community.

Results – Proposals – Measures

At the end of the 2-day conference after intense discussions, extensive exchange and networking, a package of options was presented on how to achieve the goal of utmost plurality in European film schools, which are dominated in all of their status groups by representatives of the white middle class.

There was a general consensus among the delegates, that diversity is only one aspect among many others. That also participation and transparency are important topics, and above all that we are talking about the redistribution of power. The following lists are a summary of the strategies that GEECT schools can implement in order to encourage this redistribution.

Broader access to film schools:

- Foundation Courses

- Student helpers in the application process

- Student ambassadors for outreach to other areas of society

- Cultural brokers for in-reach-strategies, building pairs with teachers

- Students in selection committees

- Contribute to improving film education in elementary and high schools

Curricula and internal structures:

- Canons dominated by euro-centric or western thinking should be reconsidered

- And/or replaced by a more conceptual transdisciplinary approach

- Established teacher with experience should pair up with young lecturer providing a variety of methods and diversity of thinking

- Include students in curriculum development in a fluid and open process.

- Free discussion among students about delicate and sensitive topics via an online learning and communication platform including a knowledge map

- Create safe spaces and safety networks

- Diversity coaching and consulting for faculty and administrative staff

- Establish an anti-discrimination policy

- Establish plurality as an important strategic goal within the mission statement and the guidelines of the school and communicate it to all status groups as well as externally

- **GEECT could create a "Best Practices Handbook" to help encourage change in the individual institutions and support the individual teachers.**

- **Create more opportunities for exchange like the "Diversity Café" or the CILECT "mighty networks" platform**

GEECT is asked to use its networking power for lobbying at the EU authorities to ensure financial support in the framework of the Lifelong Learning program for consulting and coaching of teachers and staff and with the goal to increase plurality and inclusion in audiovisual works within our film industries. This is necessary as the consequences show that they risk to lose their audiences.

Participants & Countries

During the conference in Cologne there were 88 participants listed:
7 students; 4 students from ifs Cologne and 3 students from NFA Amsterdam and
81 participants from 22 different countries.

Country		No.
Belgium	_____	8
Benin	_____	1
Bulgaria	_____	1
Canada	_____	1
Chile	_____	1
Columbia	_____	1
Croatia	_____	1
Denmark	_____	2
Germany	_____	29
Finland	_____	3
France	_____	1
Ireland	_____	1
Israel	_____	3
Italy	_____	2
Lithuania	_____	3
The Netherlands	_____	11
Portugal	_____	2
South Africa	_____	1
Sweden	_____	3
Switzerland	_____	1
United Kingdom	_____	10
USA	_____	2

Graphics by Christiane Büchner