

Research article

Exploring memory through the essay film *To Remember: An exercise into the decolonisation of the filmmaker's unconscious*

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Abstract

This research started as an effort to recover lost childhood memories. I (Emilio Bassail) used the film-making apparatus as a device that allowed me to excavate, elaborate and produce representations based on the small fragments of memory I had left. After creating an archive of reconstructed memories, I started questioning the images I had unearthed. This position allowed me to interrogate and challenge the discourses behind the images. What I discovered is that forgetfulness was in fact an effect of the suppression of potentially subversive discourses. I had not really forgotten, but rather I had chosen not to remember (since the hidden childhood memories defied the internalised discourses of power and structure). To be able to remember and therefore to create, first I had to debilitate the discourses of the power structures that prevented me from going forward in my research. Following Suely Rolnik's (2019) proposal for a decolonisation of the unconscious, and expanding on my own work, this research is an exploration of film-making as a device to remember and to produce desiring/creative subjectivities.

Keywords memory; film-making; method; psychoanalysis; artistic research

Framing the conversation

Jyoti Mistry

In the essay film *To Remember: An exercise into the decolonisation of the filmmaker's unconscious* (Bassail, 2022) and accompanying written reflection, Emilio Bassail outlines a research enquiry and method to explore memory through drawings and various imaging experiments. His practice is a vivid example of how film language can be expanded to capture the immediate lived experiences of individuals in a society where colonial histories are layered with postcolonial structures and neo-colonial economies. His practice is buoyant, and responsive to processes that unfold from iterative experiments, and yet its certitude comes from an acute awareness of how 'situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1988) informs film practice.

The conversation preceding the reflection captures Bassail's process of unlearning film practices and the importance of reflective moments that allow for unlearning: it requires a practitioner's integrity to reflect on how patterns of behaving are informed by power-knowledge structures that often have gone unquestioned; it requires renewed ways of being and bravery to pursue decolonial aesthetics and, finally, it requires that as readers, viewers and educators, we are attentive to upending those certainties of epistemologies that have remained dominant in the postcolony.

Bassail contextualises his practice through his method with memory and autobiography and, later, addresses this in relation to his own film education and his experience with teaching—translating his methods to master's students. What follows is a discussion between co-editor Jyoti Mistry and Emilio Bassail.

Emilio's essay film can be viewed on his Vimeo (Bassail, 2022; <https://vimeo.com/680187136>), along with further examples of his film practice. Please be aware that the essay film contains nudity and the suggestion of violence. Three stills are introduced here (Figures 1, 2 and 3).

Jyoti Mistry: In your research method with memory, you consciously reflect on 'questions regarding [your] position as a creator' with the underlying enquiry, 'Could we use film-making as a tool to produce radical subjectivities?' Your methodological development starts from writing to illustration, to the casting process and working with actors, and shows your critical reflection on how you engaged with the young actor – who represents you; the footage allowed you to recall a repetition of how adults treat children (perhaps how you were treated as a child). Can you expand on this reflection as it relates to your recall of how you were treated as a child yourself? Your description of the footage is provocative: 'The kid felt confused, under pressure, not knowing what was expected of him, captured by a gaze that took away all his subjective agency.' Your reflection of this material captures the integrity of a film-maker working with subjectivity with some form of revised understanding.

Emilio Bassail: While looking at my footage, a big question that kept reappearing throughout the whole process was, to whom does this gaze belong? One could assume that an autobiographical project would tend to use the main character's point of view as the frame from which the images are being construed. Nevertheless, while revising my footage, it became obvious that a lot of shots and points of view couldn't belong to the main character. This raised an important point for me regarding subjectivity and how to understand it as a collective construction.

When viewing the film, and reflecting on the production process, it was obvious that I had limited experience working with a child actor. I regret that he had no dialogue, no voice, no actions. His role was just to react to what the adults were doing. It took a while for me to realise it, but I think this has to do with the way I was raised. I was raised in a very conservative and strict environment where children tend to be thought of as extensions of their parents or as possessions. Children are not allowed to have any kind of agency or opinion. The utmost obligation of a child was to obey their parents and conform to their standards of how things ought to be. I believe these elements tend to create a series of conflicts in the way the subject produces his own image. On the one hand, there are certain expectations and obligations incompatible with reality, and, on the other hand, the subject tends to confuse his own desires

Figure 1. Still from *To Remember: An exercise into the decolonisation of the filmmaker's unconscious*
(Source: Emilio Reyes Bassail)



with the ones that are implanted from the outside. While this exploration tends to be autobiographical, I think it is not far-fetched to see the connection of these kinds of relationships to a capitalist world view where the individual can only indeed be framed as a commodity. This experience allowed me to consider the agency of the child; the importance of giving voice not just to the character of the child, but to the child actor themselves in their direction; and, finally, to include the child in their filmic representation.

Jyoti: This observation is vital since it allows us to understand how you view the relationship between practice, reflection and your revised position when film-making. This process of unlearning and relearning draws the connection between lived experiences and social power relations that previously have not been interrogated. This is central to decolonial strategies; to work with exposing how these relations have been constructed and remained unquestioned until we start to challenge these hegemonic structures through subjectivity and political positioning. You achieve this successfully through autobiography as the inception point. And this further relates very closely to the aesthetic expressions and the form of the essay film: its rich layering of sounds with voice-over, and images that work with slow dissolves, superimpositions and furtive juxtapositions that capture layers of inherent violence from colonialism to the current sociopolitical conditions in Mexico. Can you describe the source of the images, and how you have worked with these multiple layers to connect different experiences through this form of montage?

Emilio: The images and sounds come from two different sources: (1) the material produced throughout my research into memory; and (2) family archive. The latter is comprised of thousands of documents,

Figure 2. Still from *To Remember: An exercise into the decolonisation of the filmmaker's unconscious* (Source: Emilio Reyes Bassail)



photographs, films, et cetera that I inherited after family members passed away. These archives came into my possession as a series of boxes with no explanation or narrative. The history of my family has been lost throughout the generations. Although a lot of facts are missing, or a coherent narrative is hard to assemble, other kinds of stories have come to the surface. In the beginning, I tried to research my family history and how it relates to the history of the country as a whole. My grandfather fought in the Mexican Revolution, and later became a close ally of the revolutionary party. By exploring the archives, very few historical facts could be unearthed. Instead, what I found is the mark of transgenerational trauma, mental health issues that run through generations, and the violent history of my family. By exploring the archives, you find murder, exclusion, people locked in asylums, hate, self-destructive behaviour, and tragedies that seem to touch every single member of the family. I believe that these stories are not coincidences, but

Figure 3. Still from *To Remember: An exercise into the decolonisation of the filmmaker's unconscious*
(Source: Emilio Reyes Bassail)



that rather they are the product of narratives and attitudes that are deeply engrained in the family history and culture. For me, work with the archive entails disassembling their narratives and generating new ways of interpreting them, and this is the liberating exercise. What once was an effort to remember my own past and to be able to reconstruct my family history turned into an exercise of montage and creativity. It is about using these archives as raw material to produce new narratives. It is about seeing what is repeated across generations, and about trying to break away from those cycles. I try to be as playful as possible when working with this material. It is about seeing the potential of the material and its new liberating possibilities of understanding the past that can be produced from engaging through montage.

Jyoti: What of your film education experience provided the context to facilitate an awareness and develop methods to work with film-making as an exploration of ideas, rather than starting with the proposition (for example, of storytelling), which is the more conventional approach.

Emilio: In many ways, this project was an opportunity to develop my own approach towards film-making. Since the very beginning, I opened a series of conceptual questions that completely strayed from my previous knowledge about the craft. By starting the project with a series of questions (rather than with an idea or a story), I found that the whole process had to change. Notions of storytelling and artistic goals had to be set aside to be able to explore the questions I was researching – a research enquiry as the method. During this exploration, I soon realised that there is no fixed nature to film-making. Depending on the film-

making framework, a series of different possibilities may be developed. In this sense, during the research, film-making stopped working as a storytelling/artistic device, and instead became an apparatus to research and produce memory, a space through which trauma and the past could be explored. In this way, I believe that the nature and effects produced by film-making can be completely transformed depending on the way that we frame making and thinking in cinema, thus relating it to how film education is understood.

In my own experience, my first lessons in film-making came from a very conservative and industry-oriented school. Teachers used to appeal to the history of cinema, the 'great masters' and the 'rules'. This education proved to be mostly inadequate to the reality that we lived in, in Mexico. The syllabus was based on how Hollywood produced movies, which presented a series of conditions that were completely incompatible with the past and reality of Mexico, and the possibilities of what we could aspire to. We were always in lack or feeling insufficient because we were taught to appreciate values that came from a different place. More importantly, they taught us film-making in a way that was foreign to our identities, history and politics.

Since the beginning, and because of the kind of films that interested me, I distanced myself from this way of thinking about films. I approached film-making with tools and concepts that came from other disciplines, like music, literature, the visual arts and even philosophy. I tried to work always with tools and methods that seemed appropriate to life in Mexico: low-budget productions, small teams, an improvisational approach that took advantage of the general chaos and spontaneity in our culture, a playfulness that counteracted any industrial aspirations and worked with my desire to experiment all the time. This proved to be a good entrance to develop a subjective approach to the craft.

Jyoti: In your reflection on processes and methods in working with film-making as a tool to explore subjectivity, you say, 'I believe that showing a little bit of what has been my working method could perhaps work as a small case study to help reflect on the nature of film, and its education, and different possibilities to approach them.' It is interesting that you relate your understanding of the nature of film to the education of film. Can you say more about this as your approach to the subject of memory and subjectivity in your essay film?

Emilio: When I started my master's in artistic research, the idea of using film-making to research came almost naturally to me. As soon as I started thinking about film as a frame to research memory, my film-making technique changed completely. The questions and approaches to the craft were transformed to address a subjective necessity. This approach led to the production of new concepts relative to my own craft. The way I talked and worked had to do with a particular desire to draw from my own personal history. In this sense, I believe that film education may be understood as a way of exploring the possibilities of cinema, and would benefit from destabilising fixed notions or concepts. Instead of putting the student in the service of the history of cinema, we could put film-making in the service of the students' particular needs and desires.

Jyoti: The themes of your films deal directly with the colonial history of Mexico and the current experiences of living in Mexico as it relates to this past. It may be argued that your work draws from decolonial approaches to history, and the methods counter the idea of an 'industry' workflow. How does this inform how you think about the connection between decolonial methods and approaches in your own film practice and its form (the politics and aesthetics) of your films?

Emilio: My work deals with memory and the production of subjectivity – two notions that have many connections with decolonial methods and approaches towards history. On one hand, there is the need to produce a story that gives an account of a particular subjective positioning towards history and transgenerational narratives. This way of relating to narratives involves a creative stance towards the past that uses archives as malleable material. The way I work with my footage is in constant transformation,

and the stories that I produce with this method change throughout its different iterations. In this way, written history and notions relating to a fixed identity or narrative are destabilised. The past becomes a repository to produce new narratives all the time. On the other hand, by relating to the aesthetics and politics behind the production process, by using film-making to address a subjective desire or quest, the nature of film-making is transformed. The aesthetics in my films are a direct consequence of the method used. Since I use film-making to open questions towards memory, there is never a script or solid narrative as the departure point. My position as a director is never defined by a vision or a particular knowledge. On the contrary, my position is defined by openness and motivated by desire. I work with a small team that allows me to improvise and to manoeuvre easily. The aesthetics are a result of the responses to the questions, and the images are a result of the process.

Jyoti: For a brief time, you had the experience of teaching in a film programme in Mexico; how have your concerns as a practitioner working with decolonial history, memory and narration informed how you were able to impart these ideas to younger film-makers? Could you say something about the challenges and the rewards of proposing these methods?

Emilio: The main approach I took while teaching film production was to destabilise fixed notions about film practice. All the students in the master's programme came with a past experience of learned techniques. Most of them had vast knowledge of the classical techniques of film production. To open new possibilities, we started developing their film projects through a series of questions that the students brought, related to subjectivity and their desires. To answer these questions, we tried to come up with small experiments that could help them to research their particular interest. A big part of these exercises and the ongoing discussions was to allow the students to open themselves to experiences that challenged their preconceived notions of what a film project was about or how it is supposed to be done. By allowing them to develop techniques to interrogate and reflect on their research, and by putting aside storytelling or immediate desired aesthetics, we tried to uncover new relations between method and film practices.

Throughout the course, I insisted that the students form their own concepts or subjective stances towards concepts that had a direct impact on the possibilities of their film-making. By opening the possibilities of film-making to address subjective desires and necessities, and giving the students the possibility of forming their own concepts, the rigidity of theory and practice started giving way to refresh their film practices, and created room for more experimentation. The biggest challenge was to convince students that 'mistakes' were par for the course, and to challenge fixed ideas about film production and to debilitate rigid film-making conventions. This openness towards using film-making to sketch ideas, explore questions and observe allowed a more flexible approach towards the craft, and was the greatest reward of this method.

Critical commentary

Emilio Reyes Bassail

This essay takes as a departing point a several-year research project, first begun while I was part of the Artistic Research Programme of the Master of Film at the Netherlands Film Academy, in which I developed a method to recover childhood memories that were forgotten. By experimenting with different techniques, I was able to produce research that materialised the process of memory, and that put forward a series of questions regarding my position as a creator. At the end of the day, memory work inescapably puts forward a series of questions regarding the production of subjectivity, which inevitably opens the discussion towards the hegemony of some forms and modes of representation. Could we use film-making as a tool to produce radical subjectivities? This could perhaps be an adequate question to examine the effects of the research in hindsight. On the other hand, the nature of this work required that I develop

my own film-making methods, which brings us to the question of film education and the hegemony of some modes of production. Could we appropriate film-making tools to work in a way which is adequate to our ways of living? Although these questions are too broad to be answered in this essay, I believe that showing my working method may perhaps work as a small case study that helps to reflect on the nature of film, its education, and different possibilities to approach them.

The question regarding memory

At the beginning of the project, a vital question appeared to me regarding the nature of memory. At the time, I had been working for several years with the topic of memory from a political and historical axis. I was researching how some vernacular memory from the revolutionary period in Mexico could offer a counterpoint to reframe the 'official history' of the country. I was tracking the footsteps of my grandfather, a general, whose history follows a movement that subverts the narrative of the supposed emancipation of the working classes in Mexico during the Revolution. At a certain moment, that research solicited me to develop some kind of conceptual clarity regarding key words within the research. What was I talking about when I used the word 'memory'? What were the relationships between history, memory and narration?

By questioning these words, a conceptual vacuum immediately appeared in the research I was working within. Because of that, to get some kind of clarity regarding the nature of memory, I decided to leave aside for a while the historical research to focus instead on clarifying my concepts. I dedicated a whole year to reading everything I could regarding memory, from research papers on psychology and neurology, to poetry and philosophy. Nevertheless, after a while, I realised that within this bibliographical journey, rather than honing my concept of memory, I had achieved the opposite. The word 'memory' seemed too elusive, too dependent on the context and the author, with too many possible meanings. This literature review was not getting me closer to my subjective experience of memory.

To be able to appropriate the concepts, I decided then to temporarily abandon the literature review and to get close to the experience of memory. I decided that I would elaborate my own concepts through experience, artistic practice and reflection. I abandoned the question regarding memory, and I tried to ground my research in a place where I could experience something in a direct manner: the question got reduced to a simple, 'What do I remember?'

This seemingly innocent question would send me down an unexpected path that would not only transform completely my research and my professional practice, but that would also reconfigure my subjective position. By questioning my own memories, I immediately found a big void: I practically did not possess childhood memories. It was impossible for me to articulate a coherent narrative of a long period in my life. Although for certain I could recall official elements, such as the name of the school where I studied or some fragments of special events, these memories appeared more or less alienated from me, as if they did not belong to me and were only data that were learned. What had happened with all those childhood memories? Why had so many things been forgotten? Why was it impossible for me to identify with my own memories?

The research project then took a new course. I would still hold a question regarding memory; nevertheless, this question would be led by an effort to remember, recover and reconstruct that childhood that seemed to have strayed into oblivion.

The method

To execute the first phase in the process, I decided to use writing as a tool to remember. I focused on childhood memories, and tried to remember as much as possible. This process was registered through writing. From the first moments, I realised that the introduction of the writing tools transformed the process and the nature of the memory. The effort of assigning words to rather abstract experiences, the need to give them grammatical and temporal structures, the process of articulating through narration those imprints and so on, all of it transformed the 'original' memory.

The exercise of writing allowed me to see that it was possible to materialise memory. Memory stopped being a process hidden in the mind, and instead it became something that could be articulated through practice, something that could be observed and used as a raw material. Following this path, I looked for other ways to use this process.

I sought an illustrator, and I described to him places and people from my past. He made spoken portraits of people and drew the landscapes. I described to him a small town where I spent a lot of time during my childhood. I described to him the houses in ruins by the sea, a town where it always rained, the fishermen by the coast and so on. The illustrator asked me for reference points to articulate some sort of perspective or topology of the place; nevertheless, about this I had nothing to say. My childhood experience of roaming the place was composed of a series of disjointed vignettes; there was no abstract sense of space that could articulate a point of view that gave coherence to the place. Taking this into account, and driven by the need to close the traces in the drawing, the illustrator drew a place that is suspended over the clouds. Those clouds, I thought afterwards, are nothing more than the materialisation of my forgetfulness.

On the other hand, the spoken portraits kept a vague resemblance with the described persons. And yet, realism had been sacrificed to achieve something completely different that spoke about the nature of memory. The psychological traits, the phantasmatic impressions, the characters and personalities of people had all helped to configure the illustrations.

These drawings gave me a different image of memory. They showed how memories are engraved not only with perceptions, but also with affects and associative material. The image of a person or a place was kept inseparable from a series of affects and associations that built the mnemonic representation of those elements of the world.

Noting how using 'memory' as a core mechanism in my work allowed me to materialise the process of remembering and forgetting, I tried to find more ways in which to explore this idea.

The spoken portraits were sent to casting agencies with spare instructions. I only said that I wanted to find actors who had some sort of connection with the drawings. Actors from a wide age range appeared. Some came guided by a resemblance to a drawing; some came guided by a character trait that resonated with them.

To conduct the first casting interviews, I simply asked the actors to tell me about themselves, and for them to guess how they saw the life of the character in the drawing. For the selection I did not care much about each individual actor's talents or skills, or if they looked like the person in the drawing. I was interested in finding persons that allowed me to remember, who made me remember the person from the memory. I could say I was looking for some kind of transference between myself and the actors, that in some phantasmatic way, I could locate them in the role that their real-life counterparts occupied within my memory.

On the other hand, the drawings of the places were used as a reference to find locations. We took the drawings and drove throughout the coast of Mexico until we could find a place that produced the kind of memory that was inscribed in the drawings. Throughout all of this process, I was accompanied by my camera and notebook. In the notebook, I tried to register the new memories that appeared while scouting places. With the camera, I tried to capture any image that brought me back to that lost past.

After finding the places and the actors, we started doing 'reconstructions' of memories. Although my memories were most of the time too vague, without any clear words or plot, I decided I would use those small fragments as triggers for the scenes. I told my actors the one or two things I remembered, and with that scarce information, I asked them to improvise. I let the camera run for a long while to see what happened, and which possibilities were opened with those fragments of memory.

The resulting scenes occupy a strange place in terms of fidelity. By looking at the images, I cannot help but relate to them through a partial identification. Did things really happen in that way? It may be impossible to be certain; nevertheless, it is within the realm of possibilities that things really did happen in that way. However, the scenes have a rather strange quality. They appear as fragments of time, not

very well grounded in a narrative coherence. They appear as events suspended in time, foreign to any pressure from narration or meaning.

After a period of recording, I built an archive of memories in which reconstructions were mixed with the process behind them and the reflections on the making. Nevertheless, while observing this archive, I realised that in many ways I had not resolved my initial questions. Even with all this footage, it still seemed like it was impossible for me to form a coherent narrative. Although I had been able to extend in time what were only fragments, and convert them into full scenes, there was no thread that connected scenes together. The past still seemed like a big mystery to me. In an effort to inscribe some sort of meaning into the images, I started editing them. Nonetheless, I would soon find that extracting meaning from them would be harder than I thought.

Producing meaning

Every time I tried to edit the images, a strange feeling of anguish appeared. I felt sometimes as if the images were somehow being dishonest, or as if they failed to say what they ought to say. I felt that the research had failed to give me the footage to create a coherent narrative. Incapable of producing meaning, I abandoned the editing room for two years.

Still trying to form a narrative sense of the images, I went back to my initial stage in the process, and I started writing my memories again. At that point, the original memories had been conflated with the film-making and research process. Curiously, I started to realise that the narrative sense that could give meaning to my memories did not emanate from a lost past. On the contrary, the memories started to acquire meaning through the relationship and constant dialogue I kept with them. I started to notice that sometimes, outside the frame, another kind of memory appeared.

After reviewing, for example, the scenes we shot with the child who was meant to represent me inside the film, I noticed his obvious discomfort in front of the lens. I reflected then upon the relationship I had established with the young actor, and how I had behaved towards him. Being honest, I remembered that I rarely talked to him, I did not look him in the eye, most of the time I belittled his comments and questions, and I hardly gave him any stage directions. I only placed him in front of the camera and hoped that the pressure of some gaze would deliver some results. The kid felt confused, under pressure, not knowing what was expected of him, captured by a gaze that took away all his subjective agency.

A good way to frame this point in the reflection would be to think about the popular phrase that says that 'what is forgotten, is acted out'. One could argue that precisely some forgotten things from my childhood appeared as repetition in the way I related to the young actor. Through my relationship towards him, I could recall the relationship adults held towards me. By seeing his discomfort and his captive position within the other's gaze, new kinds of memories started to appear: I remembered all the control, violence, prohibitions, and the impossibility of forming a place in the world.

Within all of my footage, a question had always remained unanswered: Why did my mother not appear in it? How was it that a key figure in my life had practically disappeared from most of my childhood memories? From where did that forgetfulness come? And why did the fact of asking such questions prove to be so uncomfortable to me?

Because of a random series of events, which in hindsight may not seem random at all, I stumbled upon a box full of home videos. I transferred the films to a digital medium to be able to work with them. The footage showed scenes recorded on old holiday trips, birthdays, school events and everyday life. Nevertheless, while watching the footage, I felt a deep discomfort that in the moment I could not explain very well. It would take me a long time to start to understand why I found those images so disturbing.

Maybe the reason those images made me feel so uneasy was because they echoed almost identically a lot of elements within the reconstructions I had shot. I saw myself uncomfortable in front of the camera, not knowing exactly what to do, how to please the eye behind the camera, feeling all the time controlled by a powerful gaze. It was at that moment that I finally understood why my mother was absent

in my film, which is the same reason why she never appeared on the home videos. I realised the fact that she was always operating the camera, being the director of the home videos. And the reconstructions I did always had the peculiarity that they were shot from a point of view that did not belong to me, since I appear as a character in front of the camera. I realised those memories were not remembered through my eyes, but from my mother's point of view. The anguish and dishonesty I felt with my footage somehow related to this, with noting how that idyllic childhood belonged to someone else's gaze. My memory was full of representations that were incompatible with my own experience.

I will not go into depth about personal details in this article. Despite this, I would like to point out that the possibility of materialising this foreign gaze allowed me to start questioning a series of moral standards and modes of representation within the constitution of my subjectivity. By being able to see the ideals, the demands and commands that were inscribed into my way of looking at the world, I could start to dismantle these schemes.

Through questioning a way of looking at the world, new memories started to appear: a childhood full of sexuality, moments of extreme boredom and anguish, memories of death and cruelty, violence and trauma. On the other hand, transgressive fantasies, rituals of control, phobic objects, and a complicated relationship with desire and the body appeared as corresponding psychic elements: everything that a childhood is not meant to be (according to the eyes of a certain hegemony of representations). After reflecting a while upon it, it may be worthwhile to mention that these memories that supposedly were forgotten, as a matter of fact were always there. Nevertheless, they appeared belittled, stripped away from their essential stature within a subjective construction. Through the questioning of the images, some memories started to appear and others started to acquire some sort of 'focus'. Although this is a process that is not finished, finally some sort of narrative scaffolding, or some sort of meaning, can be inscribed into that past that seemed forgotten.

Although the work with this footage allowed the apparition of some narratives and affects, I found out, while working in the editing room, that the possible meanings of these images was not exhausted. Thanks to the repeated viewing and the different layers of meaning I inscribed on them, the images started to become elements to play with. Memory, its signifiers, turned into a space where meaning could be liberated and subverted. I started to experiment freely with my footage, with my memories, and to edit in a playful manner. Using unusual connections that had to do with coincidences in framing, rhythms, visual motifs and so on, I started to work with a montage that puts into the centre an aesthetic quality, thus defying the narratives and emotional charges of the past. If my initial forgetfulness threw me into a search for the past, and within that past I found some painful images, in the last stages of the process, I could have freedom over the interpretation of that past. The meaning was liberated, and slowly a different kind of narration could be produced.

Back to the political

In my way I developed the research beyond a therapeutic project or a mere anecdote about method. I believe if we zoom out, we can find elements that go beyond family and biography. And, if in the very beginning, this project was rooted in research about politics, history and the production of narratives, I believe it could be interesting to bring it back to that arena.

In this way, I would like to introduce the concept of colonialism as a way to reflect on subjectivity and unconscious representations. Within her essay 'Spheres of insurrection', Suely Rolnik (2019) draws an image of the capitalist-colonial apparatus as a continuum between the material forces of the world and their representations. Within this image, narratives and culturally widespread forms would work as forces that try to dominate and control the vital force of subjects, with the end goal of capturing them within hegemonic forms of subjectivity. Rolnik (2019) uses the term 'cafishéo' (pimping) to describe the activity by which the dominant system uses the life forces and desires of individuals to perpetuate a way of living. The question of decoloniality, under this spectre, would not only have to do with the liberation

from economic domination, but also with the changes in unconscious forms that give shape to this system (Rolnik, 2019: 43).

Rolnik (2019) outlines the problem of subjectivity as an unanswered question for which there are no signifiers that can ever be enough. This question, articulated as an interrogation over the subject's position in the world, can sometimes lead to restlessness and anguish. Capitalism exploits these affects as a way to incorporate the subject within certain regulated forms of subjectivity that can give an illusion of sense-of-self. Nevertheless, Rolnik (2019) tries to give us the message that to live a fertile life, the opposite must be sought. A fertile life would sustain the anguish as a question, would interpret it as a desire that is claiming to come to the surface in unexpected ways; it would stand as a gateway for the production of forms of life that avoid the repetition of the hegemonic. As long as there is repetition, the system prolongs its life. On the other hand, if the subject makes a movement that avoids repetition, that form is completely changed and new possibilities for the production of subjectivity appear (Rolnik, 2019: 54).

For Rolnik (2019), this movement is vital for the decolonisation of the unconscious mind. It is a sustained effort to avoid repeating the patterns that were inscribed on to us; it represents the possibility of holding on to life as an open question. Nevertheless, this process is complex, and it is not entirely subjected to will. To stop the patterns of repetition, first it is important to recognise those patterns, and to avoid walking through the all too known territory. As with any process that relates to the unconscious, it takes time and effort to do it (Rolnik, 2019: 58).

If, among other things, this project about memory would lead to the production of a subjective position, we could articulate Rolnik's (2019) ideas to give a different interpretation of our process. From almost the beginning, this project unfolded a subjective question through the development of a method. By leaving aside any commercial, industrial or artistic aspirations, we situated this research in a field outside the commodification process that tends to dominate many aspects of the film medium. To work without thinking of an end product allowed the opening up of a series of opportunities to explore unknown paths that would ultimately change the nature of the project and its results. By eliminating the standardised expectations of what an artistic project should do, it was possible to achieve something that produced effects of a different nature.

During the early development phases, we discarded the use of bibliography in order to prioritise the construction of ideas through reflection and experimentation. This gesture allowed for the appropriation of concepts through practice. 'Memory' for me is no longer a theoretical question; it is raw material that allows me to experiment and reflect.

At certain stages, the guiding principle behind this project was to reconstruct lost memories. In this sense, the film-making apparatus and the tools behind the process are appropriated and put into service of a subjective query. We used the imaginary power of cinema as a research tool outside the conventional purposes of film-making.

On an affective level, by accommodating stagnation and discomfort as a productive part of the process, we allowed the images to start revealing hidden meanings. If the project at certain moments reached a point where things did not seem to move forward, it was not because of an individual failure of character. Rather, these points of sluggishness allowed the appearance of useful questions that eventually led to a new way of relating towards my images. In this sense, we might give these moments an interpretation according to Rolnik's (2019) ideas, and think that if some sort of anguish appeared, it was rather a vital force claiming for some way to produce subjectivity.

On another level, by looking at the images and trying to dismantle the systems of representation and the gaze that configured the idyllic memories, we are facing not only an issue concerning an individual's life. The moral systems, values and representations do not emanate from individuals or families. On the contrary, those forms that sometimes blocked the appearance of memories belong to culture and history – they are elements of transgenerational transmission, forms that perpetuate a kind of life.

The work of questioning and dismantling some forms of representation is, in a way, a work with history. We may follow the Freudian teaching that says that it is not that remembering heals but, on the

contrary, if something is being healed, then memories appear. We could affirm that by disassembling some forms of control, vigilance and judgement, we are taking a necessary step towards a cure, towards opening the possibility for other forms of memory and history to appear.

Finally, if we think that the result of the research is after all a subjective position, we may get a glimpse of the vital importance of what is at stake in artistic production. We could invert the idea that says that the work of art is the product of the artist and think the opposite: the artist (understood as a subjective position) is a by-product or effect of the work of art. In this sense, we may consider artistic creation, research and the development of methods as vital in the conformation of the artist. In every process of creation, what would be at stake would be the opening and closure of possibilities to create radical subjectivities which could, in the end, propose a new way of being in the world that adequately makes use of life's force.

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Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

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