

How do you avoid the pressure of a positive representation in collaborative practice?

Polina Yamshchikov, student of the seminar in Documentary Film and Video, with Professor Michael Renov, University of Southern California, in conversation with Professor Pratap Rughani, University of the Arts London

Duration of video clip: 2 minutes 25 seconds

Polina: I have a question about collaborative models of making. If you're dedicated to that, which I am, one of the problems that I've run into is avoiding the impulse to want to make – if you're making a film through the collaborative model how do you avoid the impulse, I suppose, or the pull to make something that's a positive view of someone. Like if you're making a film that's in collaboration with them, most people want to have a positive representation of themselves, so how can you negotiate telling the truth and making a film that's not hierarchical.

Pratap: Positive representations. Part of my photographic work in India with so called ex-Untouchable people, so at the lowest part of the caste system, I was doing some photographic work there and helping to try to promote human rights cases. I was absolutely determined to produce “positive images” and that was partly because of the background representation of those people had been so absolutely degraded, they were stripped of their humanity in all sorts of ways that I came at it with that very much an emphasis. As I got more experience and thought about it more, I just want to unpack this word positive. I think that true positivity, a deep positivity, a positivity of the spirit even, becomes more visible in the face of adversity, in the face of looking at what the difficulties are, the suffering of the human spirit, so when you're thinking of participatory work, it's partly about how you negotiate proximity, presence, being with the other, then naturally things will unfold.