



PNEUMA
PALLAVI PAUL

Pallavi Paul is a filmmaker, film scholar, and artist based in New Delhi. Her practice explores cultural histories, questioning the limits of speculation, facticity, and evidence. Paul examines the concepts of the archive, the tensions between document and documentary, and the implications of the trace of factual events within these frameworks. She holds a PhD in Film Studies from the School of Arts and Aesthetics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her film, *The Blind Rabbit*, premiered at the International Film Festival of Rotterdam in 2020. Paul's work has been exhibited in venues including the Tate Modern, London (2013); the AV Festival, Newcastle (2016, 2018); Beirut Art Centre (2018); the Savvy Contemporary, Berlin (2019); the Contour Biennale, Mechelen (2017); and the New Alphabet School, HKW, Berlin (2020). In 2024, she participated in the exhibition *How Love Moves* in the Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin, which explored the intersections of love, breath, and collective experience. During her fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg, she engaged in explorations surrounding the cultural and emotional significance of breath in contemporary contexts. Her project *Pneuma* examined the challenges of representing breath within cinematic frameworks, fostering dialogues that bridged artistic practice and scholarly inquiry. Pallavi Paul investigates the connections that shape human experience, aiming to foster dialogue and understanding through her films and artistic projects. – Address: 389, Nilgiri Apartments, Alaknanda, India. E-mail: paul.pallavi@gmail.com.

In reflecting on my three-month fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, I contemplate the intricate interplay between breath, existence, and the communal fabric of our experiences. Engaging with the project *Pneuma*, I have come to understand breath

not merely as a biological function, but as a significant cultural and emotional signifier that has assumed heightened relevance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and other global events.

The Breathing Body in Crisis

Throughout the past few years, the act of breathing has transitioned from an overlooked physiological process to a poignant emblem of life, resilience, and collective identity. The pandemic underscored the fragility of our existence, rendering the act of inhalation and exhalation both a personal and a communal affirmation. My time at Wiko facilitated deep explorations of this concept, allowing me to engage with fellow scholars who grappled with the implications of breath in a world marked by profound uncertainty.

Moreover, my fellowship coincided with significant global events that permeated my thoughts and artistic explorations, notably the invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war in Gaza. These crises served as a backdrop to our discussions, reminding us of the urgency of our work and the interconnections between personal experiences of breath and the collective struggles for existence, dignity, and freedom. This awareness heightened the stakes of our inquiries and infused them with a sense of immediacy.

Collective Dialogues and Intellectual Nourishment

Central to my experience were the seminars and informal discussions, particularly the shared lunches with my cohort and invited guests. These gatherings provided fertile ground for intellectual exchange, enabling us to explore the nuances of our respective projects while cultivating an atmosphere of camaraderie. The diversity of thought represented in these interactions became a vital source of inspiration, challenging me to reframe my understanding of breath as a relational act interwoven with love and connection.

One particularly memorable event was the screening of *The Blind Rabbit*, organized at Wiko. The attendance of my Co-Fellows created a vibrant space for discussion, and the rich post-screening Q&A offered an invaluable opportunity to exchange ideas outside of a strictly academic format. This experience underscored the importance of informal dialogue in fostering a deeper understanding of our work and its implications.

How Love Moves: A Collaborative Exploration

My engagement in the exhibition *How Love Moves* epitomized the generative potential of collaborative practice. This project offered a platform to interrogate the intersections of

love, breath, and lived experience. As we assembled narratives and artworks, it became evident that love – like breath – serves as an invisible yet omnipresent force binding us together. This exhibition compelled us to confront the complexities of human emotion and relationality, revealing how our shared vulnerabilities become sources of strength in times of crisis.

During my time at the Gropius Bau, I felt incredibly supported by the Wiko team. A highlight was the studio visit, where my colleagues came to my workspace to celebrate the opening of *How Love Moves*. Their presence not only bolstered my confidence, but also fostered a sense of community that transcended the boundaries of our individual practices.

Institutional Collaborations and Future Anchors

The Wissenschaftskolleg has also opened up avenues for meaningful institutional collaborations, including partnerships with the Schering Stiftung, the Berlin Museum of Medical History, and the Gropius Bau. These connections have reinforced Wiko's role as a vital cultural anchor in the city, positioning it as a space where ideas flourish and cross-disciplinary dialogues take place. As I prepare to leave Berlin, I recognize that this institution will continue to anchor my thoughts and explorations, serving as a touchstone for future artistic endeavours.

The Challenges of Representation

The endeavour to represent breath within a cinematic framework presents a paradox: how does one visualize the essential yet elusive act of breathing? This challenge resonated deeply within my creative practice. Engaging with the conceptual frameworks introduced by my peers, I experimented with cinematic techniques that evoke the sensation of breath, transforming it into a palpable experience for the audience. The aspiration to create a “breathable cinematic time” emerged from this exploration, aiming to collapse the boundaries between the viewer and the lived experience.

Cultivating Community and Intellectual Kinship

My time at Wiko has been marked by a profound sense of community, characterized by an atmosphere of intellectual kinship and mutual support. The collective commitment to exploring complex ideas fostered an environment where creativity could flourish. The relationships formed during this fellowship will undoubtedly extend beyond my time at Wiko, providing a foundation for future collaborations and dialogues.

Conclusion: Breathing, Loving, and Creating

As I conclude my fellowship, I am left with a renewed appreciation of the intricate relationships between breath, love, and community. My engagement with the project *Pneuma* has not only deepened my understanding of these themes, but has also reinforced my belief in the transformative power of art as a means of connecting individuals and communities.

I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to be part of the Wissenschaftskolleg's community, where the exploration of breath and love has taken on new dimensions. As I move forward, I carry these insights with me, committed to continuing the dialogue around the vital connections that bind us together. While I may travel away from Berlin, I hope to return, continually anchored by the experiences and collaborations that this city and Wiko have offered.

Thank you, Wiko, for this invaluable experience.