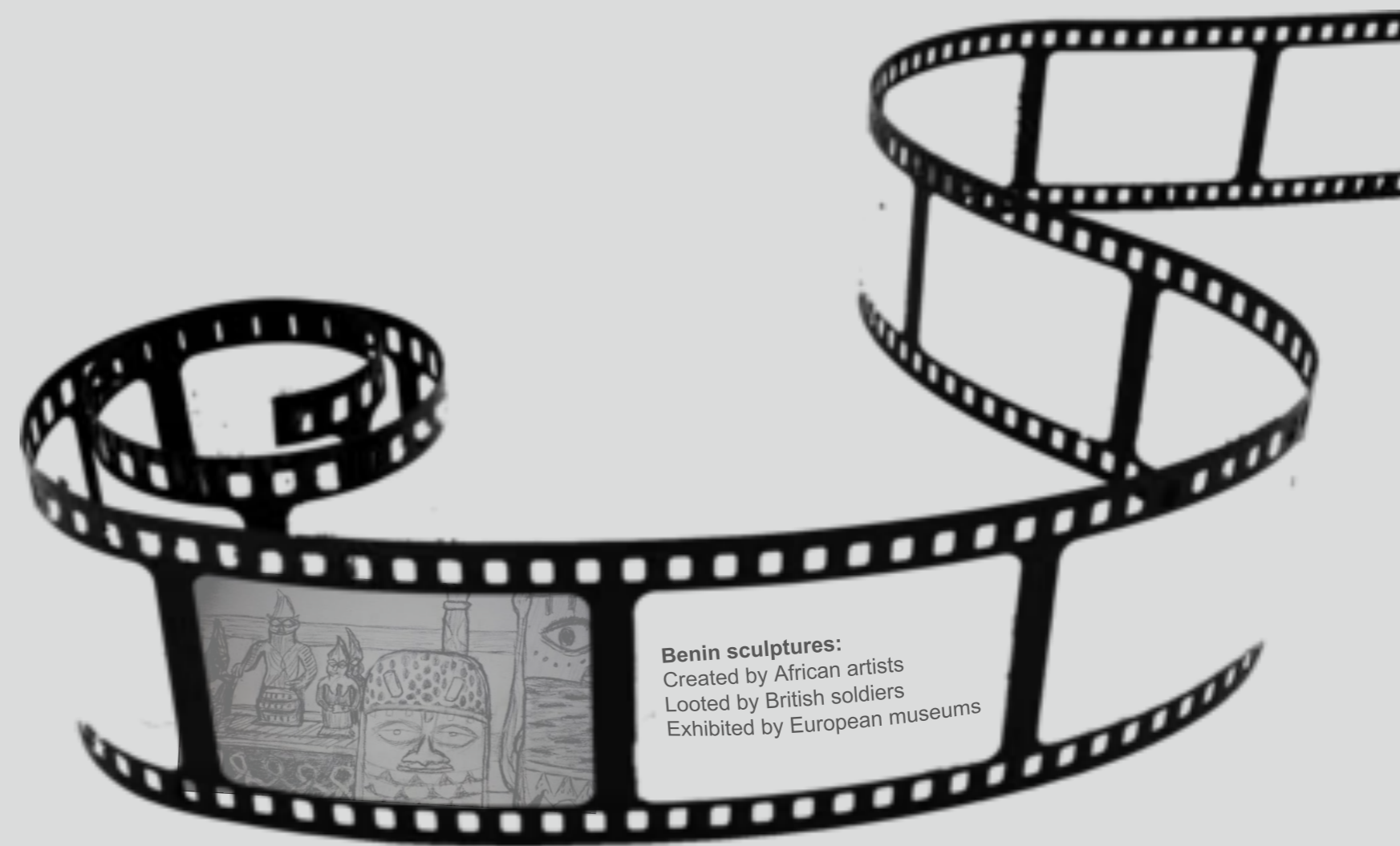


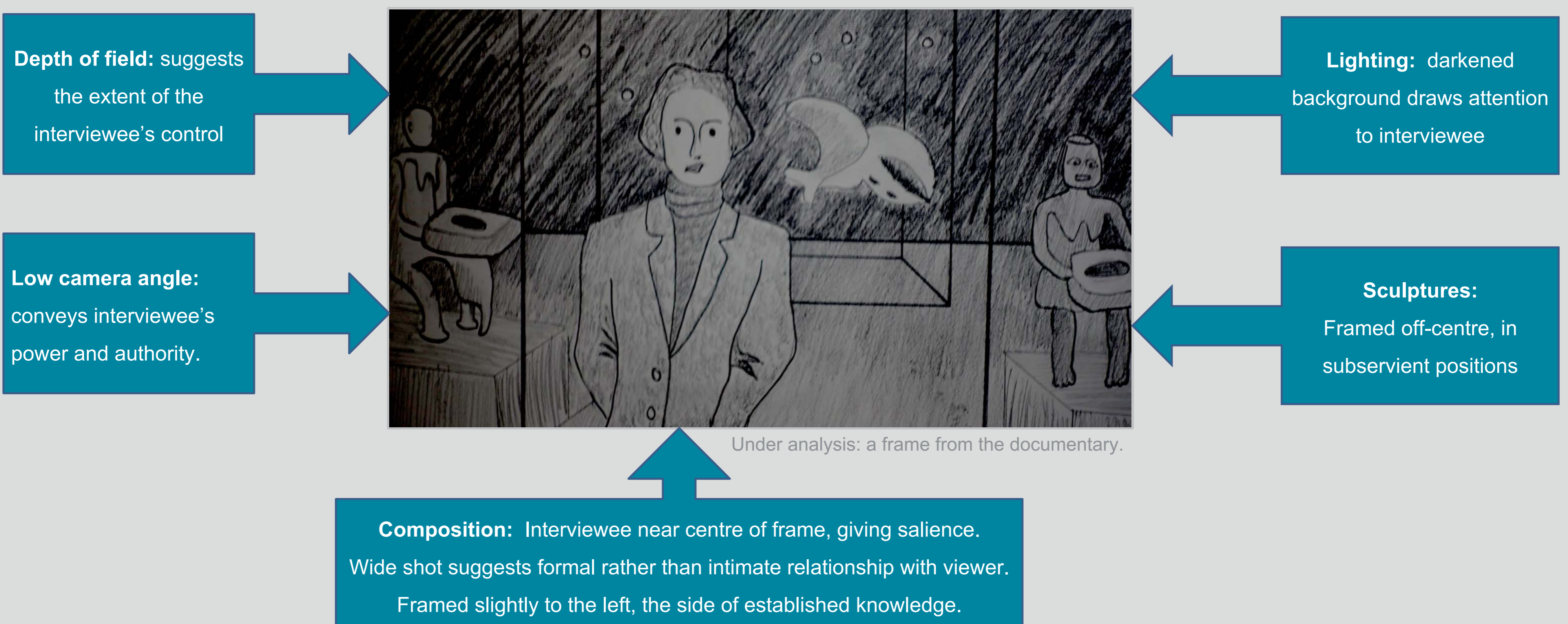
# Exploring **power** and **knowledge** in an educational documentary

This research uses visual analysis to explore how an educational documentary portrays power and knowledge. I examined a documentary I had made about an exhibition of the Benin sculptures in 2007. Returning to it in 2018, I was surprised to find out how much the framing, lighting and composition of shots reveal about a museum's control of knowledge.



## Theory and methodology:

Theory: post-structuralism (drawing on **Foucault**) and Post-colonialism (drawing on **Said** and **Fanon**);  
Methodology: visual analysis (**Kress** and **van Leeuwen**).



## Findings:

My analysis supports Foucault's (1972) ideas about power-knowledge and Berger's (1974) argument that the interpretation of antiquities is often left to "a narrow cultural hierarchy of relic specialists". Its post-colonialist critique clearly shows which voices were given weight when the film was commissioned, and which voices were marginalised.

## Key ideas:

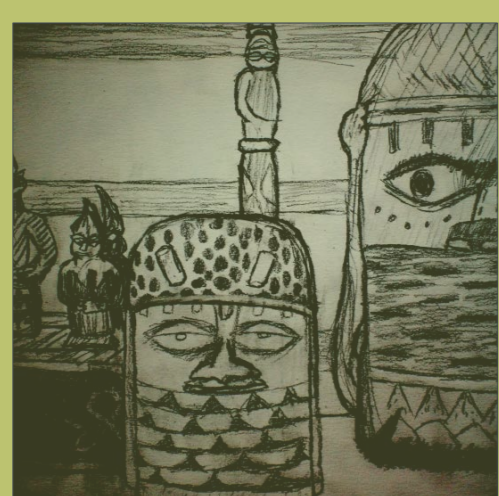
According to Foucault (1972) power and knowledge are inextricably linked. They relate to **discourse**: the way powerful institutions speak about the world and influence what is **thinkable**. Foucault called this **power knowledge**. Bennett (1995) suggests that museums, like prisons and schools, are wielders of power-knowledge. Said (2003) and Fanon (1967) have argued that all of Western academia is based on ideas brought back by early colonists about the colonised as subjects to be ruled.



## On reflection:

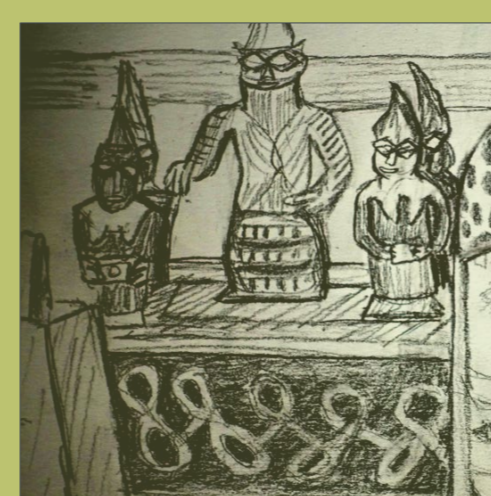
This film was commissioned in 2007. My role as producer-director was to convey the arguments of the museum about modes of display to first year students. During this research, it was sobering to discover that as a film-maker, I too was subject to power-knowledge.

By Gail Gauron, MA in Education student, 17038623@brookes.ac.uk



## Filmography:

**Producer/director:** Gail Gauron (née Block)  
**Commissioner:** British HE institution  
**Faculty:** Arts (history of art)  
**Target audience:** 1<sup>st</sup> year students  
**Year of production:** 2007



## References:

Bennett, T. (1995) 'The multiplication of culture's utility', *Critical inquiry* 21, p28  
Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of seeing*, London: Penguin  
Fanon, F. (1967) 'The fact of blackness', in Evans, J. & Hall, S. (eds) *Visual culture: the reader* London: Sage  
Kress, G., Van Leeuwen, T. (1996) *Reading images: the grammar of visual design* London: Routledge  
Foucault, M. (1972) *Power/knowledge* Brighton: Harvester Press  
Said, E. (2003) *Orientalism* London: Penguin