

The filmmakers' research perspectives: an overview of Australian and UK filmmaking research

Annual Conference Refereed Paper

ASPERA Annual Conference 2016: Screen Production Research: The Big Questions



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Abstract

Filmmaking research is part of the broader practice research paradigm – known as practice-led, practice-based and creative practice research – where films are created as research outputs in fiction, documentary and hybrid forms. Filmmaking researchers' enquiries into production practices, techniques, modes and genres used in cinema, television and online have been successfully conducted using filmmaking as a primary research method. This paper sets out to explore the approaches used in filmmaking research that have been adopted in Australia and the UK, to identify the similarities and differences between the two research environments by looking at nine sample research projects.

The sample projects illustrate the diversity of films as research outputs, where some are made as a means of exploring theoretical perspectives, like “The Brisbane Line” (Maher 2011) and “Love in the Post” (Callaghan 2014). Others were created as part of larger interdisciplinary research projects, for example “Using Fort Scratchley” (Kerrigan 2008a) saw communication and history academics work together. With the series “Reducing Bullying: Evidence Based Strategies for Schools” (Wotherspoon 2006), social scientists and film production academics created a series of films used to initiate classroom discussions around acceptable social behaviours. The common element in the sample projects is that filmmaking was used as a research method, even though each project used a different methodology.

By presenting the historical approaches to filmmaking from a qualitative paradigm and illustrating a variety of contemporary research outputs generated through the creative practice paradigms, this paper discusses the unique research insights that can be gained from the position of a filmmaking-researcher. Discussing these perspectives helps build discipline knowledge about filmmaking practice as research and includes approaches that strengthen the insider's perspective that a filmmaking-researcher can take.

Introduction

Over recent decades filmmaking as research has been increasing. In Australia, filmmaking research is called screen production research (Kerrigan et al. 2015). Screen production research is a comprehensive term, covering all forms of audio-visual media as well as allowing the stages of production, such as screenwriting and visual effects, to be included. While some research approaches investigate screen production through qualitative paradigms favoured in the humanities (Blaikie 2000) others have successfully used creative practice research paradigms (Smith and Dean 2009) from the creative arts. Both paradigms permit the researcher to argue for their contribution to knowledge created from their filmmakers' perspective. Creative practice approaches to PhDs have been examined and have shown that the variations across programs and universities "is potentially damaging to scholarly rigour" (Webb, Brien and Burr 2013, 6). Given this, a generic creative practice approach may dilute the unique and novel aspects of the art forms and Webb, Brien and Burr caution scholars and urge them to preserve "the differences between art forms and disciplines" (2013, 6). Keeping this advice in mind this examination of nine research projects will discuss how the screen production discipline can develop scholarly rigour by identifying one disciplinary area that is valuable and needs to be preserved; filmmaking as a research method.

As there is now a solid body of academic research available from Australia and the UK, we can begin to identify a range of examples where filmmaking was the primary research method. These examples illustrate how screen production research into filmmaking, about filmmaking and through filmmaking, can be conducted as well as allowing films to be made that can be called research. These findings should inform those embarking on their own screen production research where they are intending to use filmmaking as a research method.

Critical mass of filmmaking research: Australia and the UK

The book *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Smith and Dean, 2009) draws on a number of contributors from the UK and Australia and includes approaches to filmmaking as creative practice. It explains a number of approaches to research that focus on practice, known by many terms: "practice-led research, practice-based research, creative research or practice as research" (Smith and Dean 2009, 2). The authors accept the ongoing nomenclature arguments, which continue to describe different creative arts approaches used by practitioners who are enquiring into their own practice. It is easy to get distracted with arguments about definitions and approaches to creative practice, the one presented by Smith and Dean is comprehensive because it illustrates the overlapping modes of practice research:

It can be basic research carried out independent of creative work (though it may be subsequently applied to it); research conducted in the process of shaping an artwork; or research which is the documentation, theorization and contextualization of an artwork – and the process of making it – by its creator (Smith and Dean 2009, 3).

Using this definition, we will illustrate the range of screen production research projects and how they can be grouped together to illustrate the different approaches used in the Australian and UK sectors to research filmmaking.

Past work undertaken in the UK, though the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded Audio Visual PhD (AVPhD) network addressed some of the issues around practice-led research and modes and methods of practice research (Croft 2007). The past decade has also seen a renewed emphasis into filmmaking as a creative practice based form of critical enquiry which has become far more ascendant in the wake of practice based scholarship and film school style production training occurring across the university sector (Dawson and Holmes 2012; Mayer et al. 2009; Petrie and Stoneman 2014). Knudsen has added to the debate by pointing out that filmmakers are practice researchers who

are often using practice and practices as core components of our methodologies and practice as the ultimate expression and evidencing of our research findings. Creative practice outputs should, in my view, express and embody new understandings and/or new knowledge (2015, 179).

The research work done in the Australian sector extended the work done on the AVPhD network (2005-8), and now finds itself in a somewhat more advanced position to the UK, in terms of defining what filmmaking and screen production are in the academy. This appears to be due to the work done within the national peak disciplinary body the Australian Screen Production, Education and Research Association (ASPERA). In Australia, filmmaking research has come to be known as “screen production research” that suggests the emergence of a new methodology called “screen production enquiry” (Kerrigan et al. 2015).

Research in screen production is by no means a homogenous activity but usually involves the production of a film (or other screen work), an iterative process of practice and reflection by a researcher who is also the screen practitioner, and a theoretical perspective that informs the overall research (2015, 106).

A comparison between filmmaking-research in Australia and the UK can be pursued as both countries have similar higher education systems. While the Australian academic sector is considerably smaller than the UK, it has allowed for a dynamic approach to film, television and digital media production scholarship through ASPERA. Its annual conferences, special issues of journals (Broderick and Leahy 2011; Kerrigan and Batty 2015, 2016; Maher 2014) and events such as the *Sightlines - Filmmaking in the Academy* conference held in 2014 and 2016 at the RMIT University (Melbourne), have allowed for filmmaking as research to be screened, discussed and knowledge exchanged.

The small size of the Australian sector has given it agility, allowing it to respond quickly to academic policy, systems and research demands. In the UK, filmmaking research is taking place in a larger, dispersed sector that has arisen from post-92 expansion and been subject to significant policy developments (creative industries, employability, widening participation). That filmmaking research is gaining momentum in the UK is evident through activities such as the inaugural AHRC Film Awards in 2015 and some spectacular success stories such as the academy award nominated *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer 2013). The research for the *The Act of Killing* was part of an AHRC-funded research project. Both countries can learn much from each other. A comparative analysis of research emerging from both countries can provide the grounds for future research projects and help articulate screen production arguments with REF2021 and ERA 2018 approaching¹. Screen production research has been shaped by where we have come from and this journey begins with qualitative research from the media studies discipline.

1

1 REF is the UK Research Excellent Framework and ERA is the Australian Excellence in Research Australia, which provide government research metrics used to assess and classify research outputs.

Qualitative research about filmmaking

In the 1980s filmmaking began to be researched using qualitative research strategies which required “an extended and intensive period of involvement in some social world” (Blaikie 2000, 242). Qualitative methodological approaches, like ethnography, were used to examine the television production of *Doctor Who* (Tulloch and Alvarado 1983) and Tulloch used what is now a popular research method, called participant observation, where “the researcher can become fully immersed in the social actors’ world with all the levels of personal involvement that this entails” (Blaikie 2000, 242). Tulloch’s research was originally designed to mark the twenty-year anniversary of the Doctor Who series. The resulting research is a media studies text called *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* (Tulloch and Alvarado, 1983), framed by theoretical trends of the time, it presents a semiotic, narrative, generic, institutional and audience analysis of “*Doctor Who*” as an ‘extensive’ media text (Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995). Tulloch and Alvarado argue that *Doctor Who* is “a site of intersection, a nexus where codes (implicit in the programme’s determination as BBC television institution, as science fiction, as narrative, etc.) meet” (1983, 2). Thus, Tulloch and Alvarado point out

“the object of analysis, Doctor Who, is not cherished as a personal possession, domesticated, loved for the comforting store of intimate secrets it reveals to the aficionado. Rather, it is deconstructed, made to reveal its other secrets – the material practices and discourses which have determined its institution and its unfolding” (1983, 2).

Tulloch’s research had three research methods: it combined textual analysis, in-depth interviews with the production crew and personal observations and field notes based on his ethnographic approach. Tulloch was granted two weeks to observe the recording of the production. Our own conversations with Tulloch revealed a BBC public relations staff member returned from leave and interrupted the BBC Gallery recording to have Tulloch removed from set. It caused such a commotion that Peter Davison, playing the lead role of The Doctor at the time, said to Tulloch as he re-entered the Gallery: “John, what have you done! In all my years in television, I have never seen that happen before”. What Davison meant was that senior executive staff who were outside of the production crew *never* interrupted *Doctor Who* recordings. Tulloch’s presence on the set was obviously seen as some sort of intrusion or threat by those senior executives, but the nature of the exact threat still remains unclear to Tulloch, even today (personal communication).

Along with his observations of the *Doctor Who* production, Tulloch conducted in-depth interviews with the shows’ producers, directors, actors and writers including: Verity Lambert, Peter Davison, Graham Williams, Terrance Dicks, Christopher Bailey, Barry Letts, Peter Grimwade, Phillip Hinchcliffe and Douglas Adams. Tulloch’s relationship with the crew most probably drew him closer to the activity of study. Some might say it could have made him biased, others would argue that it helped him to better understand the world of the television professionals working on *Doctor Who*. Such acceptance within a research environment is the aim of any ethnographic researcher. Supporters of these research methods and ethnographic methodology would argue that as a researcher Tulloch was positioned so intimately with, and emotionally attached to, the social actors he was observing that he had a unique position to discover another’s culture, values of practice and worldview. Blaikie argues that when that occurs the researcher becomes an “insider” (2000, 242) because they “conduct research from *their* view of what constitutes social reality” (2000, 251). This can be seen, however, to compromise the objective position of the researcher. To counter this

accusation, it has become necessary for the researchers to disclose their “degrees of personal involvement” (2000, 242) in the social actors’ world in order to overcome those biases and prejudices (Weerakkody 2015, 29). These are standard qualitative arguments that defend this insiders’ research perspective.

But as Tulloch never actually held a crew role on the “*Dr Who*” production, it could also be argued that although he was intimate with the social actors’ culture he was not responsible, as a crew member would be, for the production of the show. So, in that sense as a researcher he was a participant observer who was positioned as an insider on the production of the show observing the crew’s processes. But as he was not a crew member he was still an outsider in relation to the practitioner’s perspective. The term for this type of ethnographic positioning would be *insider-outsider*. Interestingly, Tulloch repeated this methodology on a research project in Australia a few years later and achieved similar research outcomes based on the production of a commercial, television soap, *A Country Practice* (Tulloch and Moran 1986).

Using a similar *insider-outsider* positioning was sociologist Roger Silverstone, who looked at documentary filmmaking processes. Silverstone used an anthropological methodological approach to study the production of *A New Green Revolution*, a one-hour BBC documentary, written up in the book *Framing Science: The Making of a BBC Documentary* (1985). Like Tulloch, Silverstone was granted access to observe the practices of the film production team as they worked. As a non-filmmaker observing filmmaking activities Silverstone believed he was able to provide an objective assessment of the filmmaking practices he observed. This was supported through Silverstone’s anthropological methodology, which permitted him to argue for his unique research position because he could

get inside and unravel another’s world, to make sense of it, to challenge its taken-for-grantedness, to observe and comment and maybe enlighten. And at the heart of it too is a question that participants on the whole don’t or cannot ask. The question is ‘What’s going on here?’ (1985, 203).

Ontologically, Silverstone had to defend his largely subjectivist position because it was in opposition to both the positivists and the extreme objectivist position, taken by the scientific researcher (Crotty 1998, 5), that were prolific at that time, when all scientific researchers took an *outsider* approach to research. However, the idea that a filmmaker is not in a position to ask from a researcher’s perspective, “What is going on here?” is out-dated. Creative practice research approaches have opened up opportunities for the interrogation of these exact research questions. Gaining perspective from a practitioner’s view, such an approach may be called the *insider-insider* perspective, where the researcher is inside the research process and a participant in the activity of study. However, it is important to see Silverstone’s researcher perspective as developing from a time and a context when most university research was conducted from the objectivist position and qualitative research struggled to gain a legitimate foothold. At that time, it was necessary for Silverstone to defend his research approach by pointing out that there was value in him taking an *insider’s* approach to the activity of study so that he could objectively ask, as a researcher can “What is going on here?”. Indeed, filmmaking-practitioners are indebted to Tulloch and Silverstone for the enquiries they authored as their work provides insights into filmmaking practices long before practitioners themselves were permitted to mount their own *insiders’* enquiries.

Another academic, Duncan Petrie conducted research in the 1990s using qualitative research techniques, interviews and observations that allowed him to deeply examine filmmaking creativity and constraint in the British film industry (1991). These enquiries lead to the critical examination of filmmaking processes, the industrial structures and functioning of national cinemas, while other research conducted by Petrie has looked at the art and craft of cinematography (Petrie 1996, 2007). In *The British Cinematographer* (1996) Petrie provides over fifty in-depth career profiles of British cinematographers and “a close consideration

of the changing technological and economic contexts which had determined the nature of aesthetic possibility at any given historical moment” (1996, 3). Petrie’s research contributes to practice research, though he is not a practitioner himself, his ‘outsider’ perspective emphasises historical and past practices and how they inform choices for future generations (1996, 60).

Research conducted more recently, by Eva Norup Redvall, uses qualitative techniques to examine Danish television production on the series *The Killing* (2007-2012) and “*Borgen*” (2010-2013). It used similar methodologies, and methods to Tulloch and Silverstone. By developing the “screen idea system” (2013) through an examination of the creative process of television screenwriting and production, Redvall draws on the theoretical perspectives of the “system’s model of creativity” (Csikszentmihalyi 1999). By applying a systems approach to Danish drama productions Redvall argues that

Traditionally, film and television studies have tended to focus on the Person (as the artist) or the Production (the work of art). The intention in this book is to focus on the actual Process of how people develop new products in a specific, highly collaborative work context marked by many different types of constraints (2013, 7).

Redvall, situates herself as a researcher not a television practitioner and declares her *insider-outsider* position in the acknowledgements of her book:

it has been a great inspiration to experience how people at DR Fiction took an interest in the project based on the belief that they might learn something from having an outsider observe and analyse the work methods and practice of their everyday routines (Redvall 2013, ix).

Redvall’s participant observation approach allowed her to conduct interviews, as she says

‘much can be learned from interviewing, but there is great value in being able to study the actual work if one is constantly wary of one’s own position as a researcher in the process’ (2013, 13).

Redvall states her methodological approach as observational studies, similar to the approach used in production studies (Mayer et al. 2009) and her use of fieldwork as a primary method permits her to collect data through observations of “constructive work processes, which have later been interpreted as examples of best practice by the people involved” (2013, 13). Once again as a researcher, Redvall is simultaneously inside the research process but outside the activity of study. While being permitted to be in the room to observe production processes and decisions she was not active in making production decisions because she did not hold a production crew role. Thus Redvall’s *insider-outsider* perspective framed her research aims and findings in a very similar way to the research of Tulloch, Silverstone and Petrie.

Understanding the position of the *insider-outsider* researcher benefits those who are wanting to undertake research from a practitioner perspective where they are researching inside a film production and also have the skills to undertake a production crew role. This is a different perspective that informs and shapes the research from the position of a practitioner. When the perspective of the researcher changes from “objective” researcher to “subjective” or practitioner-researcher, the separation that affords them some element of objectivity, between the researcher and the researched, is significantly reduced. Therefore, research approaches that can defend the practitioner-researcher position, like creative practice become essential. So screen production researchers, who are filmmakers, can benefit from understanding these *insider-outsider* research approaches because they provide the beginnings of a methodological defence for a more subjective research enquiry that permits them to adopt an *insider-insider* perspective, a practitioner-perspective which allows them to research their own practice. In this case researching the filmmakers’ perspective.

Creative practice theorists Smith and Dean declare that practice-led research is “developing its own domain-specific methodologies” (2009, 5). There are a number of filmmaking instances that illustrate this, such as ethnographic examples that Smith and Dean (2009) have included as chapters. by Sharon Bell and digital media arts practices by Andrew Brown and Andrew Sorensen, both chapters are published in Smith and Dean (2009). Filmmaking as creative practice research situates the researcher deeply inside the activity under study, as McIntyre argues

since it is argued that experience is partially constructed from the researcher’s own subjective position, an account of this experience is valuable as it gives insights not obtainable from other research conclusions (2006, 9).

This argument supports the subjective research position of a filmmaker who adopts an *insider-insider* perspective that is “vital and necessary as all others if a ‘complete’ understanding of creative activity is to be achieved” (McIntyre 2006, 9).

Filmmaking as a research method

Filmmaking as a research method is rising in popularity and it permits the researcher to take on the *insider-insider* position, otherwise known as a practitioner-researcher perspective. Cahal McLaughlin provides one example that can illustrate this. His film, *Unheard Voices: Stories from the Troubles* (2009) lets six victims and survivors of the Northern Irish troubles speak about their experiences. McLaughlin (2010) chooses to work collaboratively with specific community groups; he employs an ethnographic methodology that uses oral history methods to film true stories of political turmoil. As a filmmaker, McLaughlin sets out to research filmmaking and his embodied filmmaking practice shapes his reality, his knowledge of that reality and the approach he takes to do his research. Furthermore, it can be argued that McLaughlin’s enquiry is unique to his position researching his filmmaking context. This subjective research account, as a filmmaking-researcher, positions McLaughlin perfectly to investigate his decisions and actions as a filmmaker that can lead to philosophical questions about how the researcher views objective truth (Crotty 1998, 11).

Seeking to uncover objective truth leads to philosophical questions about the nature of reality that is explored and the sort of knowledge that a researcher can have of it (Ruddock 2001, 27). As Ruddock argues a researcher’s perspective determines their ontology, which is “the nature of the reality ... [and their] epistemology refers to a theory of knowledge” (Ruddock 2001, 27). The perspectives a filmmaker brings to research will be unique and slightly different to someone who is researching filmmaking from an *insider-outsider* perspective. The filmmakers’ understanding of their reality, their filmmaking world, and how they participate in that reality frames the type of enquiry they conduct, how they conduct the research and how it is logically shaped. It will also have an added benefit of producing a research artefact, a film that embodies the evidence of that filmmaking research enquiry. Such an approach means that filmmaking will be used as a research method.

Filmmaking as a research method may be used alongside other methods and will mean a film's production can be recognised as a technique or procedure to gather data. This permits a filmmaker as researcher to implement filmmaking as a method, which includes an analysis of their production decisions based on aesthetics, narrative and filmmaking techniques, a crude example would be studio or field, multi-camera or single camera and fiction or documentary. In the paper *Screen Production Enquiry: A Study of Five Australian Doctorates* the authors argue there has been a patchwork approach to methodology which limits research in the medium because it “does have peculiarities that come to the fore when filmmaking is used as a primary research method” (Kerrigan et al. 2015, 2-3). These peculiarities should not be seen as obstacles that impede rigorous research, they are no different to a researcher making the same set of decisions around how they will undertake semi-structured interviews, deliver a survey or run an experiment. Indeed, other researchers are ahead of the screen production discipline in terms of advocating for visual methods (Spencer 2011) and video-based methods (Gylfe et al. 2013) as enriching research outcomes.

Spencer uses the visual method in communication and the social sciences and argues that “images and video open up complex, reflexive and multi-faceted ways of exploring social realities” (2011, 35) and that visual methods provide a powerful complement to traditional, text based research enquiries. This social science line of enquiry offered by visual research should be seen as “developing creative and versatile approaches” rather than being a “definitive guide to the practice of visual methods” (Spencer 2011, 59). Strategic management has used video as a data source, where business managers video in situ and the recordings are used as evidence to study embodied cognition in business decision making (Gylfe et al. 2013, 135). In these fields video-based research methods are seen to enrich scholarship because video data is used to augment traditional qualitative methods “in comparison to field notes and interview transcripts, video data allows the researcher to go back and revisit ‘the field’ through repeated viewings of the video” [sic] (Gylfe et al. 2013, 135). Indeed, the application of video-based methods confirms the audio-visual medium is used to make contributions to knowledge, with researchers observing that “video methods have the potential of completing the picture by providing researchers with a view on the dynamic, spatio-temporal, and socio-material nature of strategy as it is just taking form” (Gylfe et al. 2013, 145). While this argument has been created for strategic management research it could easily be applied to the filmmakers’ research enquiry into documentary production, or the choice drama director’s make when choosing between the actors’ performances from take one or take two. By using filmmaking as a research method the screen production discipline should be able to develop suitable methodologies that can increase disciplinary knowledge while also preserving the unique components of filmmaking as a creative practice.

The filmmaking researchers’ perspective

By critically examining the work of nine filmmaker-researchers we can begin to identify some distinctions based on the modes and methods of production as a means of categorising practitioners’ research (Editorial JMP 2015, 102). However, it is important to recognise that practitioners are often working across genres and forms and use different modes of production, like documentary, fiction, essay films and digital media hybrids, or modes that are specific to particularly stages of production, like screenwriting occurring before production and visual effects occurring after production. Through a critical examination of examples where filmmaking has been used as a research method it is possible to suggest a number of rudimentary groupings that can be aligned with the four components of the Smith and Dean definition for practice-led research.

The first element of the practice-led definition is that research “can be basic research carried out independent of creative work (though it may be subsequently applied to it)” (Smith and Dean 2009, 3). This can include films produced through interdisciplinary research projects. These are common in fields like history, anthropology and mental health where some interdisciplinary academic research projects have been developed into films. An example of an interdisciplinary research film is *Message from Mungo* (2014). Ann McGrath, Director, Australian Centre for Indigenous History at ANU, co-directed this film with filmmaker, Andrew Pike. The film focuses on the interface over the last 40 years between scientists on one hand, and, on the other, Indigenous communities who identify with the land and with the human remains revealed on Mungo, an Aboriginal site. McGrath’s research was conducted first and initiated the film’s production. The film breaks a number of rules for television-style documentary: it has no music track, no narrator, uses minimal archival imagery, and consists of 90% “talking heads”. Pike, an experienced filmmaker and film distributor with Ronin Films Australia, is passionate about the authenticity of the interviews and preserving the oral history approach that comes from doing in-depth interviews on camera and using minimal archival material.

Filmmaker-researcher, Alison Wotherspoon, takes an interdisciplinary approach to her research when creating films, for example *Bullying in High Schools*, which were part of larger educational or social science projects (Wotherspoon et al. 2006). Wotherspoon used participatory action research (PAR), a qualitative methodology, because it accommodated her collaborations with the other academics working on the project. Wotherspoon, as a filmmaking researcher, worked inside the research activity and PAR allowed her to reflect on her collaborations with academics, policymakers, clients and communities while producing this educational screen content (Wotherspoon 2011). Wotherspoon’s series of short films was produced through her interdisciplinary collaborations. The films were designed as audio-visual triggers for further focus group research and as educational tools for community groups (Wotherspoon et al. 2006; Wotherspoon 2011).

Another interdisciplinary filmmaker is Susan Kerrigan, the lead author on this paper. Kerrigan made two documentaries *Using Fort Scratchley* (2008a), and an online documentary *Fort Scratchley a Living History*, (2008b). But Kerrigan’s research was part of a larger historical research project, in that sense her research was practice-led but it was also an interdisciplinary research project, where oral history research methods were used as part of the documentary practice, to be consistent with research methods used by her historian co-investigators. As a filmmaker, Kerrigan (2013, 2016) focused her research on a deeper investigation of what creativity means, tacitly, practically and collaboratively. She achieved this by examining the definition of documentary, which is “creative treatment of actuality” (Grierson 1933, 8) and used her filmmaking practice to provide evidence of her creative enquiry into documentary practice. Kerrigan used a rational ontology that was underpinned by a constructionist epistemology, and a methodology called practitioner based enquiry (Murray and Lawrence, 2000). This methodology situated her as being inside the filmmaking process and allowed her to draw on her past professional practices as a filmmaker, so that she could research her practice. Kerrigan was an *insider* researching her *insider* experience.

Films produced in the academy as research may be known as interdisciplinary films inside a research context, but a general audience may refer to them as documentaries. Interdisciplinary and documentary films act as a bridge between academic and professional practice, as the McGrath and Pike project *Message from Mungo* illustrates. But when interdisciplinary films are conceived inside the academy, like the work of Wotherspoon and Kerrigan, they can be funded as academic research projects.

This allows the filmmaking-researchers to produce interdisciplinary research drawing on more qualitative methodologies, as Wotherspoon did with PAR and Kerrigan did by adopting the oral history methods that were critical for her interdisciplinary historical documentary.

The second element of the practice-led definition is ‘research conducted in the process of shaping an artwork’ (Smith and Dean 2009, 3). Examples of this approach can be found in the work of Tony Dowmunt and Gillian Leahy. Both these experienced documentary filmmakers research their own documentary practices, as they are themselves characters in the films they are making, as well as narrating their films.

Dowmunt (2010) has investigated the autobiographical documentary and the video diary form, in both theory and practice through the film *A Whited Sepulchre* (2007). Using an autobiographical documentary narrative, he tells his family history, the story of his great-grandfather who was a soldier in the British Army in Sierra Leone in the 1880s. Dowmunt uses his video diaries to explore how he is connected to the ghost of his great-grandfather.

Working in Australia, Leahy’s use of the autobiography in documentary has been something she has perfected through her previous award winning film *My Life Without Steve* (1986) and *Our Park* (1989) both were originally theatrically released and have now been released on DVD². Leahy’s most recent project, a feature length essay-style documentary *Baxter and Me* is described by Leahy as being the third film in her trilogy. It employs the same auto-ethnographic filmmaking process that sheds light on Leahy’s relationships, this time with dogs (Morgan 2013). Leahy’s use of autobiographical documentary and Dowmunt’s use of video diaries firmly situates them as acutely subjective filmmaker-researchers who appear in their films, as well as producing research that explains how they managed the responsibility of making the film. As practitioners, Dowmunt and Leahy take a subjective research stance because they hold an insider’s perspective that is magnified because they are both production crewmembers, working behind the camera as well as appearing in front of it, as part of the film’s narrative. Their presence in the narrative and their role in constructing the narrative inform the research and the type of questions they can ask of their research experience.

Bill Nichols’ modes of documentary provide six categories (2002) that indicate the versatility of the factual form. It is not surprising to see these researchers using one of those modes, participatory, as it allows the researcher to be a filmmaker, narrator and on-camera participant. The collapsing of these roles, combined with self-reflective research methods, demonstrates the popularity of both the participatory documentary form as well as the self-reflective *insider’s* approach to research that has risen through creative practice paradigms, but was initially validated through auto-ethnographical qualitative methodologies.

The third element of practice-led research is a creator’s investigation of “the documentation, theorization and contextualization of an artwork” (Smith and Dean 2009, 3). Here are two examples that achieve this, as both interrogate theory through filmmaking while the films themselves present theoretical perspectives to their spectators.

Joanna Callaghan, co-author of this paper, is a film practitioner whose research is informed by philosophy. Her project *Ontological Narratives* (2004-2014) is actively concerned with enriching and complicating the practice-based research enquiry by adapting philosophical texts into films in order to perform and re-inscribe the philosophical problems presented by that text. Her recent film, *Love in the Post: From Plato to Derrida* (Callaghan 2014), received first prize in 2016 from the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies for Best Practice Research Project. Callaghan also co-authored a book with Martin McQuillan (2014) to accompany the film on Derrida. The research aims to perform the production of knowledge within film, moving beyond illustration or representation and engaging with problems of representation and communication at the level of the film’s own ontology. Callaghan questions her position as the filmmaking-researcher in and through fictional, reflexive narratives and in

doing so probes issues of authorship, authenticity and subjectivity.²

Sean Maher (2010), used his docu-fiction film *The Brisbane Line* (2010) to explore theoretical perspectives between urban representation in Australian film, cinematic impacts on historiography, such as film noir's relationship to Los Angeles and the role of filmmaking in contemporary place making. The hybrid nature of the film is part-documentary and part-fictional and as a filmmaker-researcher Maher is exploring criticism-based filmmaking. Maher's recent creative practice project that is yet to be released, *Noirscapes*, was filmed on GoPros on location in Los Angeles and, in a similar way to Leahy and Downmunt, Maher has placed himself in the film as an on-camera participant (Maher and Kerrigan 2016). *Noirscapes* is four short episodes, using a similar criticism-based filmmaking approach, where critical analysis of the film noir genre, noir filmmakers and the historical geography of Los Angeles are explored in the episodic narratives. Maher's work as filmmaker-researcher provides another example where a filmmaker can immerse themselves in their film's narrative as they research their filmmaking process.

Callaghan and Maher share a common approach as they both use film to critically examine theories, with Callaghan focused on Derrida and Maher exploring how film can capture urban environments, be they in Brisbane or Los Angeles. Maher's project may also overlap with the documentary form and how it can explore notions of place.

The fourth element of practice-led research is the creator's "documentation, theorization and contextualization of an artwork – and the process of making it" (Smith and Dean 2009, 3). Examples that illustrate this research approach can be found in fiction filmmaking.

Australian filmmaker-academic Leo Berkeley situates himself subjectively inside the activity of study when researching his decision-making on the production of the feature film *How to Change the World* (2008). Berkeley is an experienced independent filmmaker, and a key line of enquiry on his creative practice research was to examine his activities on a micro-budget drama film that did not have a screenplay, at least as it is understood in the conventional sense. By combining a social science and fine arts approach Berkeley's doctoral research (2011) used action research and auto-ethnography that situated him as a filmmaker-researcher. Berkeley's post-doctoral research now includes essay films, two examples are *The 57* (2013), shot entirely on an iPhone and screened at the 2015 *Visible Evidence* conference and *The Q* (2015) that has had peer-reviewed international screenings at multiple festivals and at *Ethnographfilm 2016* (Berkeley 2016, online). These two films place Berkeley inside the research process as a filmmaker as well as the narrator and on-camera participant. This situates Berkeley, with approaches similar to those used by Leahy, Downmunt and Maher, as an acute *insider*.

Experienced UK filmmaker, Erik Knudsen focuses on exploring filmmaking through a practice-led research approach. Knudsen studied the creation of fictional narratives from the perspective of a screenwriter, director and editor. Like Kerrigan, he focused on the practitioner's filmmaking processes. In his journal article *The Total Filmmaker Thinking of Screenwriting, Directing and Editing as One Role* (2016) Knudsen draws on extracts of the script, screen grabs from the film *The Raven on the Jetty* (2015) and cites his reflections of his experiences as a filmmaker by stating that

The screenwriter, director and editor should be thought of as one role; one role that may be carried out in practice by three different people collaborating. If separated out into different people, each person nevertheless needs to fully understand what aspects of that single role that the others are involved with and how that impacts on the specific tasks they have in hand (Knudsen 2016, 18).

2. Both films have been released through Ronin films on DVD, *My Life Without Steve* (2007) and *Our Park* (2006).

Perspectives provided by Knudsen illustrate the importance around filmmaking competencies and the research that is being done to tease out the nuances and complexities of creative filmmaking roles. Knudsen's work can be compared to the work of Kerrigan because they describe similar behind the camera creative processes. Knudsen focuses on teasing out the complexities of the creative filmmaking roles for fiction, while Kerrigan investigates creative practices and processes for factual filmmaking. Approaches like this connect to comments by Adams about practice research and how it will benefit from constant dialogue "around modes and methods of practice research" (Editorial JMP 2015, 102).

Conclusion

Historical and contemporary discussions about qualitative and creative practice methodologies and methods show where filmmaking-research has come from, and ways that it is now being researched. By grouping these nine screen production examples around the four components of Smith and Dean's definition of practice-led research it is possible to illustrate that both countries have rich and complex research approaches where filmmaking is used as a research method. These examples illustrate the complexity and diversity of screen production research, which creates new knowledge about the filmmaker's perspective when that knowledge has been acquired through an *insider's* perspective. As pointed out this *insider's* perspective can be more acute in some research projects, depending on the filmmaker's research enquiry and their film's narrative.

Given the range and complexity of these sample projects it might be more suitable for the discipline to consider adopting a common methodology, one that can be used across both qualitative and creative practice approaches and one where filmmaking and self-reflection are part of the methods. But for now, the samples cited here help build disciplinary rigour that strengthens the research perspectives for future filmmaker-researchers. This rigour is important as it contributes to more accurate knowledge and understanding of the filmmakers' research perspective.

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