

Screenwriting as a mode of research, and the screenplay as a research artefact

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Abstract (required by the publisher to promote the book)

Screenwriting practice is now a flourishing mode of research within universities internationally, whereby the act of writing a screenplay or developing screenplay works is not only understood, but also celebrated as a legitimate form of knowledge discovery and dissemination. The resulting work of this creative practice research, which we might call the ‘academic screenplay’, thus functions simultaneously as a method of research enquiry and a ‘non traditional’ research artefact. In this chapter we explore what it means to develop and write a screenplay in the academy, under the conditions of and for research. By positioning screenwriting alongside and in between the disciplines of creative writing and screen production, we reflect on how it can draw from both disciplines at different times and for different purposes, and can be influenced by their specific – and sometimes contradictory – discourses. By doing so, the chapter provides a comprehensive overview of screenwriting as a growing mode of research, and its practice as an important addition to the academy.

Introduction

Until relatively recently, it has been difficult to discuss the practice of screenwriting in academic settings, especially in the context of research. As Graeme Harper notes about the discipline of creative writing specifically, ‘screenwriting has not always found a home as easily in the community of creative and critical writing discussion as poetry or prose has found such a home’ (Harper, 2014: ix). Notwithstanding the fact that screenwriting is a somewhat niche practice, especially in comparison to prose writing (creative writing) and the broad area of screen and media production, we believe there are four key reasons why screenwriting-as-research has not landed as conformably in the academy as its counterparts have.

The first has to do with the perception of screenplays as working documents – ‘as invitation to others to collaborate (Schrader, cited by Hamilton, 1990: ix)’ – rather than ‘completed’ and genuine creative works in their own right. Unlike novels, poems and plays – another scripted form that some would argue is not complete until it is performed – screenplays are rarely, if at all, studied in English and Literature programs. The same can also be said of Media and Film programs, which is surprising

when we consider the attention they give to moving image texts and their makers. For the most part, screenplays are [mis]understood as mere blueprints for film, television and other moving image works, rather than completed texts in and of themselves (see Baker, 2013; Baker et al. 2015; Batty and McAulay, 2016).

A strong and recent argument made by numerous scholars and creative practice researchers is that screenplays are indeed finished creative works in their own right, regardless of their industrial (production) contexts (see Batty et al., 2016; Boon, 2008; Macdonald, 2010). This is especially true of research degrees such as the PhD, in which the screenplay functions as a major work of scholarship under the guise of creative practice research (see Lee et al., 2016). Building on these ideas, Ted Nannicelli argues convincingly that scripts can and should be understood as literature, as ‘ontologically autonomous works’ (2013: 135) that are finished texts in and of themselves, and that can be read as such. Using virtual or online ‘fan scripts’, as a case study, Nannicelli argues that it is practitioners (screenwriters) who

determine the boundaries of our screenplay concept, that our screenplay concept has changed over time, that we are now in an historical moment when some screenplays are complete, autonomous works, and that we are also now in an historical moment when some people write screenplays with the intention of creating literature while certain communities of readers appreciate them as such (Nannicelli, 2013: 135).

The second reason why discussions of screenwriting as research have stalled has to do with the context in which screenwriting practice is undertaken. Bridget Conor argues that commercial screenwriting is a distinct type of creative and/or cultural work, typified by ‘standardized mechanisms of control over screenwriting labour’ (Conor, 2009: 27). Conor argues that inequitable collaboration practices and multi-authorship conditions are common characteristics of screenwriting, particularly as practiced in the United States, making it sometimes impossible to understand – and thus value – the screenwriting ‘labour’ that has actually taken place (see, also, Conor, 2014). As a largely collaborative practice, with multiple and often ‘replaced’ writers, as well as other interlocutors such as script editors, script consultants, producers, directors and financiers, commercial scriptwriting displaces a number of ideas about authorship and creativity strongly held in the creative writing discipline, which have historically been of interest to film scholars (see Kerrigan and Batty, 2016). According to Baker:

Collaborative scriptwriting refuses the notion of authorial integrity and disrupts the idea of ‘authentic voice’, which is often at the heart of the

teaching of creative writing. Scriptwriting also displaces the idea that creativity is an internal and individual or solitary process (Baker, 2013: 4).

For research, then, it can be difficult to assign ‘authorship’ of ideas, intentions and scholarly investigations to a screenplay when it contains the work of so many others, especially if produced. This is why the screenplay-as-research-artefact with a clear articulation of the screenwriter’s role becomes important to the academy.

Third is the (perceived) heavily structured nature of screenplays, and how that affects understandings of creativity and originality. The notion that scripts are blueprints for a later production – usually undertaken by someone else – has, to a large extent, informed the way they are written and read. When understood merely as production blueprints, screenplays run the risk of being viewed as technical rather than creative documents: ‘as akin to an architectural drawing – an illustration and set of instructions enabling the construction of the “true” creation that is the finished building’ (Baker, 2013: 2). Furthermore, screenplays are expected to cater for the intended production crew’s need for technical information that informs their practice.

As a result, the formatting and language of screenplays is subject to strict industry standards. These standards dictate the size and type of font used, the size, case and position of different elements of text (dialogue etc.) and also where and how scene, setting and even story are conveyed. The imposition of these standards on scripts privileges certain kinds of readers, namely industry professionals, over readers who are approaching the script as a text, as a story and a creative work in its own right. This contributes to the lack of attention paid to screenplays as stand-alone creative and/or research works (Baker, 2013: 2).

Such formatting and structural rules are believed to inhibit creativity (see Corley and Megel, 2014), but this is contestable. Take as an example the highly demanding structure of the Japanese haiku, which requires each poem to comprise seventeen syllables (in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables). The haiku is a highly structured form that performs poetic functions, such as to evoke images of nature and the seasons. The structural demands of the haiku did not inhibit the creativity of writers such as Basho and Jack Kerouac, two wildly different yet equally successful practitioners who used the form to great effect, nor does it diminish the readers’ pleasure. If anything, it enhances it. As Corley and Megel argue: ‘As with the formal requirements of poetic forms, from the sonnet to the sestina, the strictures of form and precision of language can have liberating effects and profound implications’ (2014:

11). In other words, the demands of working within defined structures and formats may in fact enable rather than frustrate a screenwriter's creative practice, the result of which perhaps being 'as liberating as the sonnet form proved for poets like Wordsworth, Keats, Shakespeare and countless others' (Corley and Megel, 2014: 14).

The fourth reason why discussions of screenwriting are not commonplace in many university departments, especially creative writing ones, is the fact that few publishing houses and even fewer academic journals publish – and therefore give visibility to – screenplays. For any serious study of screenwriting practice to occur, there needs to be an accessible body of work to analyse and discuss, which might also usefully include writers' notes or annotations, and/or reflections on the development process. Until very recently, thanks to the efforts of the Screenwriting Research Network and publications such as *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* and *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, there has been no such body of work easily available to researchers. As Steven Price argues:

only a tiny fraction of the material that screenwriting researchers may be interested in has been published; much of the reminder is either unavailable, available only in a single library collection or simply unknown. Ownership and copyright issues mean that little of this material can be legally disseminated either in digital or in print form, while cuts in funding for libraries and universities threaten both the archives themselves and those who may wish to visit them (Price, 2013: 88).

Price notes that this situation is changing somewhat as the field of 'screenwriting studies' has 'started to accumulate its materials – its evidence', even if it is 'very late in the day, compared to cognate fields such as literary criticism and film studies' (Price, 2013: 88). Nevertheless, recent developments in screenwriting studies, and for our purposes here, screenwriting practice studies (see Batty, 2016), are shining a light on the screenplay and its potential as a site of study (see Nelmes, 2010). The problem remains for some, however, when considering screenplays that are written specifically for research purposes, and the value – *or lack of it* – that some universities place on the 'unproduced' screenplay.

Despite the issues raised above, there is a growing body of scholarly work that argues for the treatment of screenwriting and screenplays as significant practices and artefacts, irrespective of production. At the very least, debate around the value and place of screenwriting and screenplays indicates that there are multiple opportunities

to explore screenwriting not only as a creative practice and an academic discipline, but also as a scholarly activity – as a mode of research.

Screenwriting as a mode of research

Thought of academically, screenwriting practice possesses a critical research focus that ‘often reflects the distinct vision of a single writer-researcher’ (Baker, 2013: 4). It can also be systematically much more self-reflexive than in the industry, meaning that ‘the writing is informed more by discipline specific knowledge than by commercial demands or the expectations of wider audiences or readerships’ (Baker, 2013: 4). In this regard, ‘screenplays can – and do – use research to underpin their creation (practice-led research); their content and form (research-informed practice); and their critical and industrial contexts (research-led practice)’ (Baker et al., 2015: 3). While the most commercial screenplays do benefit from research of a particular type, here we refer to research with a metaphorical capital ‘R’: a screenwriting practice that relies on and foregrounds academic research at every stage of the process.

Research in academic screenwriting might include aspects such historical, legal and geographic information, but it goes much further. Screenwriting research, whether framed as *about*, *for* or *through* practice (see Frayling 1994; Hope 2016), is aimed at producing new knowledge on every level. This might comprise narrative techniques that adhere to or expand on existing paradigms (see Batty, 2009; Jacey, 2010; Taylor, 2014); the industrial contexts that shape how a screenplay might be developed and pitched (see Lee Street, 2015; McMillan, 2014); the social, cultural and industrial relevance of the script as text (see Sculley, 2015; Igelström, 2014); and the very practice of screenwriting itself (see Hawkins, 2013; Sawtell, 2016).

Jeri Kroll argues that writers in the academy – here also meaning academic screenwriters – are ‘functioning in multiple ways: practicing as artists; researching their creative process; researching their art form itself; and engaging in practice-led research (in order to discover new knowledge)’ (Kroll, 2008: 10). Screenwriting that takes place under the guise of creative practice research thus has a different set of goals than commercial screenwriting does. For Kroll, this falls into three categories:

1. The research proceeds by and for the practice (goal). By experimenting and, thus, developing new or advancing accepted techniques and methods, the writer uses a “stock of knowledge to devise new applications” (OECD definition). “Thus practice here means an approach to a subject based on

knowledge acquired through the act of creating” (Harper and Kroll 2008, 4). This goal advances the practice of the art form.

2. The research proceeds through practice in order to produce a creative product (goal). By researching and practising, the writer produces innovative work of a high order that advances the art form (the genre, the content, etc.).
3. The research proceeds before/during/after practice, aided by ideas generated by practice, in order to produce new knowledge (goal). The writer researches and practises in order “to increase the stock of knowledge, including the knowledge of man [sic], culture and society” (OECD definition). This knowledge can be embodied in the creative work and [any] exegesis individually, in the combination of the creative and critical as a whole, or in an integration of the two (Kroll, 2008: 9).

Screenwriting in the academy is often undertaken without any arrangement in place for production; which is not to say that these screenplays *cannot* or *should not* be produced. Rather, they are more akin to the ‘spec script’, ‘written speculatively by a writer who chooses to do so other than at the behest of a studio or producer as a work for hire’ (Corley and Megel, 2014: 12). Examples of this include the nineteen scripts published across two special issues of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* (2013; 2015), under the umbrella theme ‘Scriptwriting as Creative Writing Research’. Each of these scripts was written ‘on spec’ within and for the academy, peer reviewed anonymously by practitioner-researchers who understood the research expectations of these works, and published with accompanying research statements that articulated the background, contribution and significance of the scripted works.

The shift towards the creation of screenplay research artefacts mirrors a similar shift that took place in creative writing almost 20 years ago, and more recently in the discipline of screen production, where subject associations such as the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA) are building their confidence in defining and articulating the screen works produced by practitioner-academics as research outputs (see Kerrigan et al., 2015; Glisovic et al., 2016). Screenwriting as a mode of research is, arguably, at an important time in history, where understandings of the practice are improving, and case studies of the resultant research artefacts are increasing.

The screenplay as research artefact

Moving beyond a director-centric appraisal of screen works to an acknowledgement of the important roles played by the creators, writers, showrunners, storyliners and script editors of these works, the ‘screenwriting turn’ we have experienced over the past decade has certainly opened up avenues for screenwriting-as-research to be considered more seriously. Following the growth of screenwriting subjects and programs across the world, it stands to reason that – just like in the discipline of creative writing – research would follow. The Screenwriting Research Network (SRN) has played a key role in this, with many researchers contributing to many publications, including the *Journal of Screenwriting*, bringing screenwriting studies to an international stage. But it is in Australia that screenwriting practice research has really emerged, namely from the numerous creative practice research degrees that have been completed across the country.

Speaking of the SRN, Claudia Sternberg reflects on what she sees as a potential new avenue for screenwriting studies:

The conversation between practitioners and academics, although not always without prejudice and contention, has also been sought and found by way of such networks. Practice-led or arts-based research as well as analytical insights of screenwriters into their practice offer additional pathways for future writers and researchers [...] I continue to be excited by case studies based on untapped resources which bring to light lesser-known writers, screenplays and textual or personal relationships (Sternberg, 2014: 204).

Arguably, in Australia this has been the case for at least a decade; certainly, Australia has many more screenwriting practice PhD graduates than anywhere else in the world (see Batty and McAulay, 2016). Nevertheless, even here the discipline is small when compared to creative writing and screen production, for example. In this niche domain, however, we can find solidarity and work through issues and definitions more easily, in anticipation for what might prove to be an even bigger growth in screenwriting practice research over the next decade.

For a discipline whose central concern is practice – the screenwriter *writes*; screenplays are *written for production* – it is vitally important that we understand and value research that is undertaken to assist with writing practice. As Baker argues, ‘scriptwriting is a *writing* practice that deserves scholarly attention’ (Baker, 2013: 4, emphasis in original). At a time when the academy speaks so frequently of creative practice research, and how our work can be useful to and have an impact on industry, community and other external stakeholders, it seems serendipitous that creative

artefacts and practice-based knowledge that are understood out of the academy and are accessible to so many, are increasingly being valued as research artefacts.

Based on research as opposed to professional practice – though fully acknowledging that screenplays developed in the academy can reach into industry and can be producible – screenwriting that occurs in research incubation is advantaged by ideas, opportunities and perspectives that create ‘the possibility for surprise, for the kind of creative disruption [...] that precedes innovation’ (Cherry and Higgs, 2011: 20). Concerned with ‘improving and/or innovating practice, and by doing so also creating new knowledge about practice drawn from an insider’s perspective’ (Batty and Berry, 2016: 184), screenwriting in the academy offers the pursuit of ideas and practices based on personal, philosophical and/or practical research interests, which may or may not be related to the industry. These interests or pursuits, as Cherry and Higgs highlight, provide opportunities for innovating future work, not only of the individual screenwriter but also of others in the field, which may include the industry.

The screenplay as a research artefact is thus a result of a unique creative practice research methodology, comprising various methods and techniques that include the act of writing and/or reflecting on that writing. Performing its research ‘data’ symbolically in ways recognisable to its audience (see Haseman, 2006), the screenplay as research artefact uses its inherent devices – such as form and format, structure, character, theme, setting and dialogue – to *tell* research. Screenplays as research artefacts thus contribute knowledge in their very fabric, and although accompanying dissertations, exegeses or research statements explicate this research, they do so in conversation with the screenplay itself. To write a screenplay and reflect on its making only – that is, not for the screenplay to have research ‘in it’ – does not make the screenplay a research artefact. Here the practice of screenwriting becomes data collection, with the contribution to knowledge found only in the accompanying explanatory work.

Screenplays vs. films: identifying the contribution of the writer

Screenwriting as a mode of research also acknowledges and celebrates the screenwriter’s intentions and their contribution to a story. The contribution to story of the screenwriter is foundational and core. This is best demonstrated by the very simple fact that a screenplay can exist as an artefact in its own right: it can be read and enjoyed for the story it tells, and technical formatting aside, can convey its

meaning without reference to production. In a screenwriting research context, it is the role of the screenwriter that must be framed and articulated, which is likely to be quite different to that of a director, producer or editor, for example. Even if these people are collectively making the same film, their perspectives and practices of the screen idea will differ, resulting in different role-related undertakings of research. Reflecting on the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF), Adams and McDougall note how with creative practice works that were submitted for assessment, 'the question of the research imperative was not always well articulated' (Adams and McDougall, 2015: 99). An example of this for screenwriting might be a produced film that explores questions of voice and the silenced (e.g., *12 Years a Slave*), yet whose research statement does not identify the role that the screenwriter played in this. Talking about the film in general makes it very difficult to locate the research work of the writer, and as such whether or not this brought innovation or originality to the screen idea.

Writing a research statement focussed on 'overriding research questions that clearly [locate] the practice and an individual's specific contribution within academic contexts' (Adams and McDougall, 2015: 99), articulates and validates very clearly what each practitioner-researcher has attempted and hopefully achieved. In the above example, for the screenwriter this might involve discussing the research background and influences on the development of character, the deployment of a particular narrative shape, or even how previous screenplays were researched to understand how their use of dialogue aligns with ideas of voice and the silenced. Interventions such as the aforementioned special issues of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* are helping to shape this discourse, but submitting screenplays for research evaluation through systems such as the REF and Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) is still somewhat unfamiliar.

The push to have screenplays recognised as texts in and of themselves does not, however, mean that the produced screen work is unimportant or undesirable; nor does it prohibit collaborations and interdisciplinary work between screenwriting and screen production practitioner-researchers. Partnerships between these parties – who both use the screen to do research, albeit in different forms representing different stages of the screen production process – would simultaneously provide rich and innovative ideas for the screen, and fresh ways for these ideas to be executed. What is important to remember in a research context, is that though screenwriting and screen production are not mutually exclusive, they are and have to be recognised as discrete

disciplines that generate their own research outcomes (artefacts). To say that a screenplay cannot ‘count’ until it has been produced – which can happen in some academic settings when discussing the nature of a research output – is not only philosophically incorrect, but also an affront to the screenwriter-researcher.

Method writing: the screenplay as research and pedagogy for practitioners outside the discipline

Interdisciplinary opportunities might also exist for screenwriters to work with practitioner-researchers from associated or other disciplines, perhaps to provide ways that those outside of screenwriting can conduct their own research, creative practice or otherwise. While the research questions and endeavours of each of these disciplines are likely to be different, together they can co-create a variety of works that complement the skillsets of each, potentially resulting in innovative research outcomes that benefit everyone involved. Writing is, after all, its own method of inquiry (see Richardson and St Pierre, 2005); a method that can be used by and applied to other areas where writing can become an important way of knowing. We come to ‘know’ through investigation, discovery and reflection, which is research. Investigation, discovery and reflection are indispensable components of any writing practice, where we learn about something more deeply as we write about it. Screenwriting can thus be used to teach things other than screenwriting itself.

The practice of screenwriting offers unique opportunities for practitioners in disciplines such as acting or performance, movement, voice, sound design and even lighting to explore issues core to their disciplines. For example, it is not uncommon in teaching and learning scenarios for actors to write scripts to explore performance techniques and hone their skills, particularly in relation to character development and execution. With screenplays, actors can also use writing practice to discover what is possible on screen, and how, for example, given the sparse use of dialogue, they might need to convey story *beats* using their body.

Screenwriting can also be used in educational settings to teach future directors about the limits and possibilities of the screen idea: about how elements such as space, movement and setting come together to tell a story. It might also be used to teach sound designers and cinematographers how to think more deeply about their craft to convey meaning, both as instructions to other members of a production team and also how to convey, via text, story elements that will be executed in the form of sound and

light. While in the industry these experiments might not be possible or desirable, in the academy they can be valuable pedagogies and for some, liberating.

Lisbeth A. Berbary (2011) recounts her experience of developing a ‘creative analytic screenplay’ on the basis of an ethnographic study of sorority women that she undertook at a US university. Concerned with ‘the ways sorority women learned gendered expectations, were disciplined towards compliance, and sometimes resisted or reinterpreted expectations of the dominant discourse of “ladylike”, Berbary turned to the screenplay form ‘to challenge notions of “traditional research” and make space for “doing representation differently”’ (Berbary, 2011: 186). Conducting ‘over 70 hours of participant observations, 17 two-hour in-depth interviews, 7 artifact collections, and numerous informal interviews and observations’ (Berbary, 2011: 187), Berbary was not only faced with a vast amount of data, but moreover the problem of analysis: ‘I was taking moments that were overlapping, contradictory, in motion, and experienced simultaneously and attempting to categorize them by traditional practice into concrete, stationary, segregated groups’ (Berbary, 2011: 187). ‘Recognizing the need for a literary form that allowed for movement through settings, thick descriptive story telling, the use of quotes, and the integration of [her] own voice’, Berbary chose the ethnographic screenplay – which was never intended for production – as a means by which ‘to represent the complex gendered lives of sorority women in a contextualized, polyvocal genre’ (Berbary, 2011: 187).

This is a fascinating example of how a researcher from a non-creative field has embraced the screenplay not as an industrial or commercial pursuit, but rather as a means of finding a form that is more authentic for disseminating her findings – of doing representation differently. Specific to her research findings, Berbary writes:

I was able to *show* rather than simply *tell* readers how sorority women were caught within dominant discursive systems of femininity and were disciplined through both overt and covert methods such as sorority court systems, new member meetings that disseminated gendered expectations, and girl trash talking/storytelling that helped to reinforce appropriate behavior among friends (Berbary, 2011: 195).

More importantly perhaps is the notion that the screenplay can bring ideas and concepts to wider audiences than those of traditional research. ‘Rather than disconnect and reduce experiences’, using the screenplay as a mode of research ‘instead encourages involvement, inspires curiosity, creates inclusivity, and constructs

depictions that remain in the thoughts of readers in ways that traditional representations sometimes do not' (Berbary, 2011: 195).

This is where the screenwriting practice PhD has the potential to take research in new and original directions. With a strong history in Australian universities, and now growing in the UK, Ireland and South Africa to name just a few, screenwriting practice PhDs – as distinct from 'screenwriting studies' PhDs – are displaying the potential for innovative and outward-facing forms of knowledge discovery and dissemination. A research degree 'in which the screenwriter makes use of the intellectual space offered by the academy and those within it to incubate and experiment with ideas, with the intention that their processes or their screenplays – *or both* – change as a result' (Batty and McAulay, 2016), the PhD is appealing to experienced practitioners wishing to expand and enhance their ideas using theory; to emerging practitioners who seek to combine their research abilities with their creative ambitions; and to researchers such as Berbary, who wish to find more authentic ways of representing research.

On face value, the PhD *through* screenwriting practice is *about* screenwriting practice: but there exist many opportunities for non-screenwriting practitioners to use the screenplay as a site for knowledge discovery and dissemination. If narrative enquiry can be used in education, health and management studies, and for other qualitative research purposes (see Johns, 2006), then can screenwriting also be used as a way of doing and presenting research in a wide range of disciplines? Where film is increasingly being used to 'do' the work of research, evoking ideas and theories through sensations, evocations and experiences (see Berkeley et al., 2016), the screenplay can also be used to embody and perform research in ways that, for example, might not be possible in traditional academic writing. Some screenwriting researchers are already using screenwriting practice to explore issues such as identity, gender and colonialism and how the screenplay might embody their findings more profoundly than a traditional research paper (see Baker, 2013b and 2015; Beattie, 2013; Taylor, 2015). We might argue, then, that the screenplay – especially the fiction screenplay with its infinite possibilities for content – has the potential to take research into a whole new world, for a new set of researchers and audiences alike.

Conclusion

Over the next few years, it will be interesting to see where screenwriting practice research takes us. As we have seen happen with the expansion of creative writing over the past 20 years, and are now seeing happen in the discipline of screen production, screenwriting as a mode of research is likely to grow exponentially, broaden out to encompass numerous research themes, pursuits and stakeholders, and develop a wide range of methodological approaches to knowledge discovery and dissemination. While screenwriting practice as research is accepted – namely thanks to the plethora of creative practice research that underpins our understanding of it – we still have some way to go in cementing screenwriting as a well understood and appreciated mode of research.

One area that needs further work is the notion of the screenplay as a text in and of itself, as an artefact to be *read* – as research and/or as creative practice that is not dependent on its production. While this is broadly understood by those in the discipline of creative writing, evidenced by factors such as special issues of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, in the discipline of screen production this is still somewhat contested. There are still those who believe the screenplay only ‘exists’ once it has been made. While these views often come from filmmakers – producers, directors, and so forth – as opposed to writers, or those working in script development roles, we must listen to these views and understand their concerns. The completion of a substantial number of screenwriting practice PhDs currently in candidature, over the next few years, will hopefully help with these debates and assist in the creation of a ‘canon’ of work to turn to – case studies, best practice, and so forth.

Beyond this, research-based screenplays that do make it into production – as films, television and online works – might also provide interesting insights into the screenplay as research. For example, if a produced film can be articulated as research by its director, with specific reference to the role played by the writer and their screenplay, we might begin to better understand the contribution that screenwriting makes to the practice of others. More published screenplays will also be useful in this debate, not only if they are subsequently made as screen works, but also if they are well received by their reader-audiences. Imagine, for example, an unproduced screenplay winning a major literary competition.

Nevertheless, screenwriting practice research – as a mode of research; as a way of discovering and disseminating knowledge – is unquestionably flourishing in the academy right now, internationally. It is exciting to see the number of PhDs being

embarked upon; it is pleasing to see a rise in the number of publications that speak directly to screenwriting practice research; and it is rousing to find examples of non-screenwriting practitioners turning to the screenplay as a way of doing and representing research. Moreover, it is even more stimulating to see discussions of screenwriting share centre stage with broader, perhaps more typical, discussions of screen production, as we find here in this book.

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