A Filmmaking Research Continuum
The Articulation of Creative Practice Research

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Abstract

Exploring aspects of the development of filmmaking research within the Academy over past decades, this article focuses on creative practice-based methods and the establishment of filmmaking as a legitimate research endeavour. It delves into the nuances of filmmaking research methodologies, specifically the rearticulation and repositioning of research practices to encompass both the work of filmmaking production and further filmmaking engagement with its reception. The importance of research statements in elucidating scholarly contributions made by films and other screen works, like scripts and video essays, is emphasised, alongside discussions of

peer-review processes and the role of creative practice research journals in fostering critical dialogue within the filmmaking research community. Despite ongoing tensions between academic and industry requirements, the article argues for the progress of filmmaking research as a distinctive discipline with distinct methodologies, highlighting the need for continual refinement in quality assessment metrics to reflect the evolving nature of the field.

Keywords: filmmaking, peer-review, research statement, screenwork, creative practice methodologies

Introduction

Filmmaking in the Academy has matured. The opportunity to present filmic outputs and screen works produced through practice-based research has been nurtured for forty years (Kerrigan et al. 2015). Practice-based methods of research have contributed to a vibrant community of filmmaking researchers, qualified within their disciplinary norms, to conduct research in a way that allows it to "be understood as making a recognisable contribution to knowledge within the fields of cultural production from which it emerged" (Dovey 2007, 65). It appears that this community is achieving the aspirations of Dovey, who was seeking the recognition of filmmaking in the Academy so that it would be aligned with "cultural industries as playing not just a training and education role but a research role" (2007, 65).

Our filmmaking research is part of a global Western filmmaking discipline and as authors we acknowledge our geographical and cultural specificity as Australians who have a white, Anglo-Saxon heritage. Filmmaking research in this paper includes *screen production*, a term commonly used in Australia (Kerrigan et al. 2015), where we are focused on Western practices as observed predominantly in the UK and Australia. We are not positioned to speak for diverse practices and contexts of research and filmmaking in other countries, particularly the Global South where varied social, economic, political, and cultural contexts play a significant role in shaping those filmmaking practices (Dawson and Holmes 2012; Kishore, Sarwal and Patra 2014; Kishore and Saxena 2019).

The discipline of filmmaking research is defined as research created through a film and/or a screenwork that contributes new ideas

and/or practices which advance scholarly and cultural knowledge by pushing at traditional filmmaking boundaries and research methods (Kerrigan and Callaghan 2018). Films and screen works as research outputs are also known in an Australian context as *Non-Traditional-Research-Outputs* (NTROs) and the scholarly value of these forms of research is now "largely accepted alongside more traditional forms of research" (Crofts and Nevill 2019, 284). However, the written word is still relied on to explicate the research in a screen work and it is now an accepted disciplinary practice for research statements to be published alongside a screenwork. To ensure research quality is maintained when reviewing the screenwork, both screenwork and research statement are peer-reviewed in tandem (Crofts and Nevill 2019).

It is not possible to have a film or screenwork assessed at an institutional level, or within a national assessment of research excellence inside the Academy, without a description of how the film or screenwork contributes to new knowledge, and/or impacts and engages a community. This means filmmaking researchers must usually articulate the new knowledge that has resulted from the filmmaking activity in written form for a screenwork to be deemed a research output.

Extending the boundaries of Filmmaking Research

Filmmaking activities as contemporary forms of Western filmmaking research were discussed and debated as part of the Filmmaking Research Network project (FRN) from 2016-2018. Academics from 21 Universities came together with the UK's University of Sussex and the Australian University of Newcastle, co-leading the project. A survey conducted by the network reached 24 countries with researchers in 112 Universities responding (Kerrigan and Verdon 2019). The FRN consolidated and made claims to legitimise the methodologies and creative practices used to ensure filmmaking was perceived by the academy as a research endeavour (Kerrigan and Callaghan 2018). Seven filmmaking production modes were recognised by the network: professional practice; interdisciplinary; documentary; fiction; essay films; screenwriting; and digital media hybrid works. Crucially, the network found that films produced within academia often attempt to fit within industry models that are largely hostile to the characteristics of academic research out-

puts. Since the FRN project, debates have continued regarding commercial modes of filmmaking (Mateer 2018) alongside the maturation of a new sub-discipline, videographic criticism, based on the audiovisual essay (Álvarez López and Martin 2014).

Videographic criticism (Grant 2016) is based on scholarship that draws most often on the cultural history of cinema as primary material. This research most often critiques and examines cinema through exploring "filmmakers or genres, specific movies or fragments therein, or a more theoretical aspect of the 'cinematic machine' in general" (Álvarez López and Martin 2014, para. 4). Álvarez López and Martin (2014) argue that studies of the videographic moving image sit at one end of a continuum with found footage collage at the other. We suggest that this continuum may not end with found footage, but instead could be extended to connect with the filmmakers who originally created the found footage as well as those who create cinema. Repositioning cultural and cinematic reception into a space in which filmmakers create films through cultural production (Johnson in Bourdieu 1993, 5) fosters research connections between film production and cinema reception.

The connection between audio-visual scholarship at one end with commercial modes of filmmaking at the other creates a continuum across theory and practice. In turn, it acknowledges the "cinematic machine," central to a cultural critique of the medium exists because of the mass production of commercial filmmaking. These connections link filmmaking production with screenwork reception and/or consumption across a continuum in which cinema is produced and firstly consumed by audiences in a commercial context, then re-consumed as a cultural commodity—that is, remixed through audiovisual cinematic scholarship. Videographic criticism has found homes in online journals including *Screenworks* and *[in]Transition* where creative artefacts with accompanying research statements are peer-reviewed and published. These new connections between commercial modes of filmmaking and audiovisual scholarship, made evident since the FRN, might now call for a reworking of the filmmaking research definition.

Rearticulating Filmmaking Practice Methodologies
By redefining filmmaking research to include the reception and/or cultural consumption of films, along with their production, includ-

ing videographic criticism, we are suggesting it is possible to create a scholarly continuum that employs similar methodologies in order to undertake filmmaking research. Academic filmmaking research communities are recognised by both niche and broad discipline descriptors, with *filmmaking*, *screen production* and *screen media* describing core research disciplines which are derived from the wider disciplines of film, screen, media and communication, cultural studies, art and design, and the creative arts (music, creative writing, drama, dance, performing arts).

The establishment of "Creative Filmmaking Research" (Kerrigan and Callaghan 2018), and "Screen Production Research" (Batty and Kerrigan 2018) as formal methodologies, draws on creative practice research descriptors that emerged through "Creative Arts Scholarship" (Smith and Dean 2009). Applying these research descriptors to filmmaking and screen production required significant and sustained engagement and articulation because the nomenclature that describes creative practice research overlaps, interlinks, and can produce specialist "research insights" (Smith and Dean 2009, 5) not collected through any other methodology. The creative practice research definition argues that research is "conducted in the process of shaping an artwork; or research […] is the documentation, theorization and contextualization of an artwork – and the process of making it – by its creator" (Smith and Dean 2009, 3). The research defence around the creation and shaping of an artwork, based on professional practice expectations, has been collected and debated by many, including the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA). Recognising a need for clear and communicable research standards in the discipline, ASPERA investigated perceptions of filmmaking research quality in the Academy and published quality guidelines for research excellence in NTROs in an Australian assessment context. This work was completed, however, without any engagement from the cinematic-, film- and cultural- studies disciplines. Two ASPERA reports produced in 2017 and 2018 identified a key tension: the "call and response" between filmmaking process (generating new knowledge for teaching and the discipline more broadly) and product (public exhibition, social impact that have significance for esteem measures) (Batty and Glisovic 2017; Batty et al. 2018).

While process-focused research thrives in the iterative, reflective space, achieving public recognition through a finished film often operates as a proxy measure for research success and quality. This tension poses challenges for screen production researchers as even with successful public exhibition or distribution of screen works, academic institutions may not always recognise films as research outputs (Batty and Glisovic 2017, 3). The ASPERA reports aimed to address these problems of recognition through providing examples of quality indicators and measures of esteem. The report examples subscribe to a then-dominant approach of citing proxy measures rather than the arguably more subjective, intrinsic measures of research excellence. Some Australian universities such as The University of Sydney (UoS 2021) and Swinburne University of Technology (SUT 2022), now refer internal peer reviewers for NTROs to intrinsic quality indicators. By proposing intrinsic quality indicators like innovation and significance, instead of relying solely on public reach or industry success as proxy measures, these institutions are working to shore up disciplinary integrity and recognition within academia, regardless of external factors. The work done by ASPERA defends the research enquiries of filmmaking practitioners who produce predominantly works for the screen but also those who produce unpublished screenplays as creative research outputs.

Notably, these ASPERA reports did not address research approaches often used to create audiovisual essays. As Grant (2016) argues, videographic criticism uses performative approaches to capture the research creation of an audiovisual essay. This approach emerged within the creative arts as a research methodology "which may include material forms of practice, of still and moving images, of music and sound, of live action and digital code, all work[ing] performatively" (Haseman 2006, 4). It is best applied in research conducted through performance and human movement, where bodies are used to perform research as an artistic practice in front of a live audience (i.e. dancers). The application of Haseman's use of performativity to defend the work of a researcher who is practicing as a film editor can be considered as an extension of the original parameters of the definition. Film researcher and screen editor Pearlman (2016) has mounted similar arguments about how an editor works with a "mass of moving materials in front of them" (2016, 69), and this means the performative activity of editing is a "cogni-

tively complex artistry of shaping time, energy, and movement, particularly the movement of events, emotions, image and sound to create cycles of 'tension and release'" (2016, 68). Pearlman (2016) argues film editing is an embodied and intuitive practice, in which an editor's filmic agency, intuition around aesthetic choices of shots, timing, and rhythm is part of the research practice of editing. This lends itself to recognitions of shared activity and intent between filmic performative practices and creative practice research.

And these arguments run in parallel with those put forth by Grant (2016) and Álvarez López and Martin (2014), who defend the employment of creative practice activity from a cinema and film studies perspective, in which videographic criticism makes a clear link "between audiovisual creativity and reflective research/scholarship" (Grant 2016, para. 9). The creative practice defence has been employed to justify the audiovisual choices made by cinema and screen scholars who employ an audiovisual essay to "probe [and] identify a new energy in creation and critique" (Álvarez López and Martin 2014, para. 2). By rearticulating filmmaking and creative practice methodologies to encompass the recent debates on videographic criticism, it is possible to align approaches and research designs defended by filmmaking practitioners with those who are seeking to advance scholarship around the cultural consumption of cinema as a scholarly and creative pursuit.

The approaches, from both filmmaking as cultural production and filmmaking occurring through forms of cultural consumption, lay claim to their respective filmmaking practices being described as a research activity because they are articulated through a research statement that is published in tandem with the screenwork. We next examine the pragmatics of demonstrating research legitimacy through the research statement.

Approaches to Research Statement Rhetoric

Filmmaking research outputs, including audiovisual essays, publish a research statement with the film or screenwork in order to explicate new knowledge and provide crucial context for the work. Although we respect the strong argument that a creative work embodies research without recourse to ancillary material (Sullivan 2005), we argue that for filmmaking researchers and peer reviewers, research statements create clarity. The publication of a film as research

output following peer-review, where the film can be viewed, usually online, recognises the value of knowledge contained within the work, alongside an explication highlighting the research context, contribution, and at times impact, which may not be immediately evident within the screenwork.

Scholars like Gibson, make a case for "audio-visual knowledge" (in Batty and Kerrigan 2018, vi) and identify the challenges of enacting and communicating research concerned with "the specific, quick qualities of the cinematic medium itself" (ibid.). Significantly, Gibson notes that research in this discipline takes place with three possible intentions: "research *for* creative projects, research *about* creative projects and research *through* creative projects" (ibid. vii). Gibson's notion of the "cognitive two-step" (ibid, vii) is evidenced through the powerful combination of creative work and research statement. For Gibson, new knowledge gleaned *through* practice, not just in the creative practice output, is where research contributions in this field predominantly lie. We suggest that scholarship on the audiovisual essay may fit into research *about* creative projects given that this form of scholarship is argued to be about a medium that is part of cultural history (Álvarez López and Martin 2014, para. 4), whereas research into production modes of filmmaking would be research *through* creative projects.

Research statements supporting creative practice outputs provide opportunities for articulating theoretical approaches, exploring creative and professional procedures, as well as contextualising cinematic theories and movements. In doing this, they provide rigour and an analytical framework for research enquiries that can be focused on both consumption and / or screen production. Peer-reviewed journals publish films and screen works accompanied by research statements, where the statement may outline research questions, methodology and approaches used, and provide theoretical context and the impact and significance of the work. In the journal *[in]Transition* for example, "most commonly, the creator statements are used to comment on the relationship between videographic criticism and other forms of research practice… the majority of statements focus on promoting the unique qualities of audiovisual thinking" (Garwood 2020, 6). Each journal stipulates their own specific criteria and word count (Screenworks submission 2023a; ASPERA 2023a).

The journal *Screenworks* hosted the first publication of films with research statements, released as a special issue in the *The Journal of Media Practice* in 2007 (vol 8.2) (*Screenworks* 2023b). The editor, Dovey, and associate editor Crofts, used an open review process, where the audiovisual work was published alongside two anonymous peer reviews. An open and critical debate of the research between scholars was encouraged allowing for "a dialectic between the contextualising research statement and peer review through which new knowledge can emerge" (Crofts and Nevill 2019, 295). The journal *Sightlines: Filmmaking in the Academy* also employs anonymous open reviewing. Publishing the film and the research statement online with de-identified peer-reviews and subsequent researcher responses "fosters critical debate on the evolving nature of screen-based creative practice research, by highlighting a variety of research aims and approaches" (ASPERA 2023).

The *Sightlines: Filmmaking in the Academy* journal emerged as a complement to the biannual *Sightlines* screening event. The curated screening event is widely accepted as evidence of research significance in Australian national research exercises and serves an important function in the research and creation process with each screening at the event followed by a research Q&A between filmmaking-researcher and audience. These conversations afford filmmakers opportunities for informed feedback and to share research insights. Submissions to the *Sightlines* journal must be "filmmaking research that occurs in the university sector" (ASPERA 2023b, para. 2). As mentioned, the film or screenwork is published with the research statement along with the responses from two anonymous peer reviews, but also with a filmmaker's response to the peer-reviews in a "call and response" exchange. This format developed in response to early issues in which the submitted screenwork was most often not altered to accommodate reviewers' suggestions, unlike the common response for traditional research output review responses. Peer reviewers' requests for more detail in submitted research statements has seen the word count extended from 500 words to up to 1500. The community of filmmaking researchers value this form of dialogue that emphasises a research exchange while preserving the integrity of the film or screenwork. Difficulties arising for ensuring the anonymity of peer reviewers due to the relatively small size of the discipline brings its own set of challenges

when allocating reviewers. The peer reviewing and publishing process is framed to mitigate concerns regarding the effectiveness of review when cost and technical requirements of the research output may preclude changes, and creates a publishing environment that acknowledges that the screenwork may not be modified solely in response to reviewer comments.

A discussion of peer-reviewing processes that amplify filmmaking research produced through journals like *Screenworks* and *Sightlines* presents another disciplinary continuum in which filmmaking research publication content is underpinned by broader disciplinary enquiries and traditions. For example, *Screenworks* is a journal that appears to value visual and aural aesthetics produced through refined production choices, generating research that aligns with traditional fine 'art' pratices. Conversely, *Sightlines* is more recognisably connected with professional and vocational practices within industrial models of filmmaking, closely aligning this type of research with media and communication traditions. In noting these differences that link aesthetics to industry and cultural practices, we argue again for a continuum across research generated through filmmaking in the Academy. This is creative practice research that is becoming less siloed, more inclusive, and that represents a more open form of scholarship that has the potential to be extended to disciplines well beyond our screen discipline boundaries.

Having established that the research statement is critical to advancing our research community's dialogue, we acknowledge that these journals, and thus their editors, the community of peer-reviewers, and filmmaking researchers, have been instrumental in maturing the discipline into a field that produces world class research outcomes. Often this is research activity that would not be possible to carry out in industry due to commercial pressures. Nevertheless, frictions remain for filmmaking and screen practitioner-researchers who choose to make work within academic contexts (FitzSimons 2015; Kerrigan et al. 2016), with allegiances to their academy employer in tension at times with allegiances to the broader scholarly discipline beyond their institution. On balance however, it appears that the discipline is increasingly legitimised and now more often recognised as a field of research excellence within the academy.

Conclusion

The argument encapsulated here demonstrates how filmmaking research matures inside the academy as practitioners and researchers continue to assess eligibility and defend assessments of research quality for this work. Alongside is an acknowledgement that foundational definitions that help a discipline to grow may need review to include the emergence of sub-disciplines, as in the example of videographic criticism. Key indicators continuing to steer the growth of filmmaking research are industry aspirations (both film production and cinematic consumption industries), localised university assessment practices, and compliance with national research quality and impact exercises where traditional text-based research and citation continues to dominate. Although the discussion above confirms that the discipline is now established and has matured over a relatively short space of time, there remains a need to explicate filmmaking research through the written word – the research statement – in order to make research contained within a film or screenwork evident to all.

Metrics often used to assess films and screen works are not yet adequate to convince the broader research community of the intrinsic value of filmmaking research. Efforts of scholars in establishing and maintaining peer reviewed journals that publish creative outputs alongside text-based research statements show that it is possible to create a community that assesses research from a place of shared understanding and can provide rigour and scholarship to advance understandings of this set of research practices. It is clear that international capacity-building work embarked on over the last decade is ensuring that filmmaking research is responding positively to academic challenges and tensions. From this foundation, ongoing adjustments to how research is measured will ensure that the discipline continues to grow within the Academy.

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