

Shoestring Theory:
Pragmatism and Bricolage
in Microbudget Feature Filmmaking

Stuart James McBratney
BVA FTV Prod (Hons) (Brisbane)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	5
TITLE DEFINITIONS	5
Pragmatism	5
Bricolage	6
Microbudget	7
Feature Film	7
THE CREATIVE WORK AND ITS EXAMINATION	7
Chapter Breakdown	10
Research Overview	12
METHODOLOGY	14
Methods	19
Autoethnography and Tacit Knowledge	20
LITERATURE REVIEW	24
The Gap	26
Pragmatism	28
Bricolage	35
Creativity	38
Design Thinking	42
Reflective Practice	49
Theory vs Practice	54
CASE STUDIES	65
Breathless	70
<i>4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days</i>	72
<i>Slacker</i>	74
<i>Clerks</i>	77
<i>Pi</i>	80
PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND	83
Early Years	83
Professional Filmmaking	84
CREATIVE WORK – “POP-UP”	85
Pragmatism and Bricolage in practice	86
Writing	90

Casting	104
Funding	106
Locations	109
Crewing	110
Production Design	113
Photography	116
Editing	130
Sound Mixing	133
Music	136
The Completed Film and its Exhibition	139
SUMMARY	140
REFERENCES	148

ABSTRACT

In this exegesis I argue that the filmmakers who have enjoyed the most success in creating ultra-low budget feature films are those who most successfully practice pragmatism and bricolage. I support my argument by analysing several ultra-low budget films to find a common approach, and by cross-referencing my own observations with filmmakers' production journals, interviews, and writings. To investigate the lived experience of the microbudget feature filmmaker, I wrote, financed, produced, directed, acted in, edited, scored, and mixed such a film myself. My resulting work, *Pop-Up*, is the embodiment of my tacit knowledge of pragmatism and bricolage, and this exegesis presents my explicit knowledge of the filmmaking experience. This creative work and exegesis is intended to fill a gap in the knowledge of these principles and their practical application. It aims to provide a formal understanding of how the methods and theories of pragmatism and bricolage can be applied to feature film production, particularly where the filmmaker is working with limited means.

DEFINITIONS

The title of this exegesis, *Shoestring Theory: Pragmatism and Bricolage in Microbudget Feature Filmmaking*, requires the definition of the terms: pragmatism, bricolage, microbudget and feature film.

Pragmatism

The term “pragmatism” has two definitions. One is used in everyday life, and the other is from the philosophical domain. In a colloquial context pragmatism is a utilitarian attitude towards challenges; *Merriam Webster* online (2017) defines “pragmatic” as “relating to matters of fact or practical affairs often to the exclusion of intellectual or artistic matters: practical as opposed to idealistic”. The philosophical definition takes this precept of flexibility and applies it to a belief system. Charles Sanders Peirce, considered the originator of this philosophy, describes it as an approach that evaluates theories or beliefs in terms of the success of their practical application – a flexible, subjectivist, relativist worldview offering distrust for theoretical abstraction or ideas that