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Title:

Screen Production Enquiry: a study of five Australian doctorates

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Dr Susan Kerrigan is a screen production scholar who specialises in creative screen practice through practice-led research techniques for screen production. Susan is a current recipient of an ARC Linkage Grant entitled 'Creativity and Cultural Production: An Applied Ethnographic Study of New Entrepreneurial Systems in the Creative Industries'. Susan's research is closely aligned with her past employment at ABC Television Sydney (1987-2003), where she worked across a variety of productions using multi-camera and single camera approaches. Susan has professionally produced and directed Australian television programs including Play School. Other highlights include 'continuity' on Australian Drama TV productions (including Wildside, GP, Big Sky).

Leo Berkeley

Dr Leo Berkeley is a senior lecturer within the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. He also has considerable experience as an independent filmmaker, having written and directed the feature film, *Holidays on the River Yarra*, which was an official selection for the Cannes Film Festival in 1991. More recently he has developed an interest in a new media form called 'machinima'. A machinima work he produced, *Ending With Andre*, screened at the 2005 Machinima Film Festival in New York. In 2008 he also made a micro-budget feature film called *How To Change The World*. His current research interests are in the practice of screen production, low and micro-budget filmmaking, improvisation, essay films, community media and machinima.

Sean Maher

Dr Sean Maher is a Senior Lecturer in Film, Screen & Animation in the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane, Australia. He has written, directed and produced films selected into the Brisbane International Film Festival, and distributed across Fairfax Media. He has previously worked on music videos, lectured at AFTRS, been a policy researcher at the Communications Law Centre (UNSW) and been a festival organiser for New York Anthology Archives. Current research areas are cinema and its intersections with urban theory.

Michael Sergi

Associate Professor Michael Sergi is the Director of Film and Television at Bond University. Michael has directed over 100 hours of television drama in Australia and New Zealand, including *Home & Away*, *Neighbours*, *Pacific Drive*, *Breakers* and *Shortland Street*. He co-wrote and produced the feature film *10 Days to Die* in 2009, and associate produced the feature film *The Fear of Darkness* in 2014. In 1995 Michael co-founded the Canberra International Film Festival, and was its artistic director for 13 years. He is currently the senior programmer for the Darwin International Film Festival, and is a regular judge for the Australian Directors Guild Awards and the TV WEEK Logie Awards.

Alison Wotherspoon

Alison graduated from UNSW (BA. Dip.Ed. Hons) and went on to work at the BBC, Film Australia, ABC, SBS and as an independent producer, before taking up an academic post at Flinders University where she is now Head of the Department of Screen and Media. In her PhD, *From Evidence To Screen: a model for producing educational content in the twenty first century*, Alison presented an innovative model for producing evidence-based educational content through creative collaborations between academics, policymakers, practitioners and screen practitioners. Alison continues to use this model and is currently producing and directing a series of short documentaries on bullying research in India.

Abstract

Within Australian universities, doctoral research in screen production is growing significantly. Two recent studies have documented both the scale of this research and inconsistencies in the requirements of the degree. These institutional variations, combined with a lack of clarity around appropriate methodologies for academic research through film and television practice, create challenges for students,

supervisors, examiners and the overall development of the discipline. This paper will examine five recent doctorates in screen production practice at five different Australian universities. It will look at the nature of the films made, the research questions the candidates were investigating, the new knowledge claims that were produced and the subsequent impact of the research. The various methodologies used will be given particular attention because they help define the nature of the research where film production is a primary research method.

Keywords

Filmmaking; research; PhD; practice-based; screen production; methodology.

Introduction

Screen production is developing as an academic research discipline, with many universities in Australia now awarding Creative Screen Practice PhDs and/or Doctorates in Creative Arts. The five authors of this paper have all recently completed screen production doctorates and are closely involved with the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA), which has been active for several years in efforts to more precisely define the nature of screen production researchⁱ. As early exponents of film-as-research in Australia the authors will reflect on their doctoral experiences, which were presented on a panel about the contemporary screen production PhD at the 2013 ASPERA conference at RMIT. Reflections on that panel presentation have been documented as a co-authored blog called 'The Australian Screen Production PhD' (Kerrigan, S., L. Berkeley, S. Maher, M. Sergi, and A. Wotherspoon 2014). These five doctoral works are significant because they represent research enquires that adhere to five unique institutional guidelines. For some of these institutions it was previously unknown to undertake practice based research in filmmaking, with two of the doctorates being the first screen production PhDs to be completed at those universities (Wotherspoon 2012, Kerrigan, 2011).

The purpose of this article is not to undertake a comprehensive account of each candidate's higher research degree (HDR) experiences. Instead it will present an overview of the five doctorates by comparing how their various research processes informed the making of each film. The five doctoral films varied significantly in terms of scope, genre, narrative form and aesthetics, but they do shared a common purpose, designed to create new knowledge about screen production processes through creative practice research. Using filmmaking as a primary method for research enquiry, the doctorates intentionally shifted the focus away from researching the film as a product to researching factual and fictional filmmaking

processes.

The candidates were all undertaking a doctorate because they wanted to explore their screen practice more deeply through academic research, building on experience they had gained working professionally in the industry and teaching within the higher education sector. Berkeley (2011b) made a fiction feature film and his research objective was to employ dramatic improvisation to explore how a film can be made without a screenplay; Kerrigan (2011) investigated 'the creative treatment of actuality' (Grierson 1933, 8) through the production of two non-commercial documentaries; Maher (2010) made a hybrid documentary about the city of Brisbane and his research presents a new way to look at filmmaking and its relationship to notions of place and place-making; Sergi (2012a) drew on embodied filmmaking practices as a drama director to examine how he assesses an actor's performance on-set; and Wotherspoon (2011) investigated her production of a series of documentaries and presented this case study as a model for creating and funding educational content.

Creative practice doctorates have been offered in Australia for over thirty years and during the last decade screen production doctorates have increased in popularity (Petkovic 2013). In this context, it is concerning that Petkovic argues the screen production sector is not 'entirely understood by the wider academic community' (Petkovic 2013, 79). A further concern is the apparent inconsistency in how creative arts doctoral programs are conceived and implemented, across universities and the various creative disciplines. An Australian study into such programs argues that 'the variation across programs and universities is potentially damaging to scholarly rigour and consistency in the field, and yet the differences between art forms and disciplines areas should be preserved' (Webb, Brien, and Burr 2013, 6).

This paper will examine the current state of the screen production doctorate in Australia and seek to identify its specificity. We will argue for its status as a distinct research discipline in relation to other creative arts and the broader academic community. This will firstly be undertaken by looking at how screen production doctorates are structured at different universities and the requirements candidates need to complete, identifying inconsistencies that create challenges for examination in relation to candidates, supervisors and examiners (Webb, Brien, and Burr 2013). Secondly, a discussion of the creative research approaches undertaken by the five doctoral candidates will focus on methodologies. Recognising that any discussion of methodology should be built on the foundations of an appropriate ontology and epistemology, the paper will also consider the nature of knowledge within filmmaking research and the extent to which knowledge about screen production can be adequately captured using methodologies developed for other purposes and within other disciplines. As an emerging academic research discipline,

methodologies in screen production doctorates are often borrowed and adapted from more established disciplines. A patchwork approach to methodology is limiting, as the medium does have peculiarities that come to the fore when filmmaking is used as a primary research method. Finally, by looking at the research outcomes that have been generated from these five doctorates, for example through peer-reviewed screenings, journal articles and conference publications, it will be argued that each doctorate has fulfilled its purpose by contributing new knowledge to the field of screen production.

Australian Screen Production Doctorates

In attempts to better understand creative practice doctorates in Australia, the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) recently funded two projects. The first was called 'Examination of doctoral degrees in creative arts: process, practice and standards' (Webb, Brien, and Burr 2013). The second study looked specifically at screen production and was titled 'Developing a collaborative national postgraduate research program for 22 Australian film schools' (Petkovic 2013). Both project reports provide valuable information about the Australian creative arts doctoral landscape for the screen production sector. Webb, Brien, and Burr argue that a doctoral degree must be driven by a research question, underpinned by a methodology and capable of contributing new knowledge to the field (2013, 18). Complying with these requirements ensures that the doctoral programs are aligned with the Australian Quality Framework (AQF).ⁱⁱ Given this, Webb, Brien, and Burr argue that

a doctorate in the creative arts involves the candidate either conducting research into a field of practice, and presenting that research for examination in the form of a conventional written dissertation; or conducting research through creative practice, and presenting for examination a creative artifact and a critical dissertation. The latter is the form typically associated with the term 'creative doctorate' (2013, 18).

This understanding of creative practice research lays the foundation for the evidence presented here that looks specifically at Australian screen production doctorates. Over the last fifteen years the Australian screen production tertiary sector has experienced rapid growth, with thirty institutions offering postgraduate research education through screen production PhDs and/or Doctorates of Creative Arts (DCAs) (Petkovic 2013, 79). In 2012 a study of the Screen Production sector was completed and it included seventeen participating institutions based on the membership of ASPERA. The results confirmed there were 86 PhD candidates across 13 institutions

and 36 DCA candidates from 4 institutions (Petkovic 2013, 150-151).ⁱⁱⁱ At the Masters level there were 81 research candidates.^{iv} Supervising these postgraduate students were 184 full-time and part-time screen production academic staff (Petkovic 2013, 136). From this group of supervisors, only 35% had PhD qualifications with 40% of the full-time academics attempting to upgrade their qualifications (Petkovic 2013, 138). A PhD has become an essential criteria for employment in Australia as a screen production academic. The five candidates in this study were counted as part of the 35% with PhD qualifications.

In a critique of an earlier typology proposed by Victor Burgin, Bell (2008) has identified four types of screen production doctoral candidates. A significant early contributor to the debate around film production as research (2006, 2008) who identified the background of many screen production educators in the professional industry, Bell's typology allows a candidate's doctoral inquiry to be assessed against the skills, knowledge and practices they bring with them, variable prior experience that frames their practice-led inquiry. The five doctoral candidates in this analysis all comply with Bell's first type,

creative professionals who wish to advance their understanding of their professional field via an innovative mix of making work and documenting and reflecting upon their studio practice in a sustained critical engagement (2008, 176).

The three other categories are graduates who have completed studies in 'creative media practice' (Bell 2008, 176), are from the social sciences or cultural studies and 'wish to acquire the creative skills and practice methodologies [...] such as ethnographic and experimental film' (Bell 2008, 176), or have a basic training 'in studio arts but who wish to reframe their practice within critical discourse' (Bell 2008, 176).

The common categorisation of the five candidates using Bell's typology can also be seen to strengthen the comparisons in their doctoral experience undertaken in this paper.

Five Screen Production Doctorates

The five doctorates in this study were completed through five Australian institutions and each candidate worked to specifically detailed guidelines set out in each institutional award. Generically, four of these doctorates can be described as 'PhD with creative artifact', which required the submission of a 'creative object plus 15,000–60,000 word essay' (Webb, Brien, and Burr 2013, 17). The fifth was a 'Doctor

of Creative Arts', which required the submission of a 'creative arts product/s plus 30,000–40,000 word essay' (Webb, Brien, and Burr 2013, 17). A brief overview of each research project follows, presented in alphabetical order and outlining some of the requirements of the awards. A more detailed account of these individual doctoral works can be found on the co-authored online blog '[The Australian Screen Production PhD](#)' (Kerrigan, S., et. al 2014), with the full doctorates available through the references provided.

Berkeley completed his PhD at RMIT University. The doctorate was titled 'Between chaos and control: a practice-based investigation into the creative process of an improvised micro-budget screen production' (2011b). His research objective was to make a film without a screenplay (at least as understood in the conventional sense) and with only a negligible budget. The feature film, 'How To Change The World' (75 min), was accompanied by an exegesis that explored how creative practice in screen production can be transformed into a research practice, which integrates professional, cultural and academic experience.

At RMIT the PhD creative project guidelines stated that an exegesis of 20,000 to 40,000 words supports a creative project (RMIT Higher Degrees by Research Policy 2014, online). Berkeley states that

The exegesis I wrote was at the upper limit of this range. I was aware of the existing literature in relation to the shifting status of the exegesis in creative practice doctorates (Fletcher and Mann 2004; Dovey 2007; Krauth 2011) and the concerns about excessive weight given to the exegesis in the examination process (Dovey 2007; Dowmunt and Thomas 2005) so in writing the exegesis I was conscious of keeping the focus on the film. My objective was to position the film work in relation to my prior productions and the broader field of screen production, as well as articulating the new knowledge produced by the creative practice research, situating it within the field of knowledge in relation to improvisation and micro-budget production (Berkeley in Kerrigan, et al 2014: online).

Kerrigan worked out of The University of Newcastle (UoN), with her PhD titled 'Creative Documentary Practice: Internalising the Systems Model of Creativity through documentary video and online practice' (2011). Kerrigan created two documentaries about an historical site in Newcastle called Fort Scratchley, which were part of a larger research project looking at the *Living History of Fort Scratchley*. Presented on DVD, the documentary 'Using Fort Scratchley' (Kerrigan 2008a)(53 min) was a low-budget film exploring the history of Fort Scratchley. The second creative

work, an online database documentary or idoc was titled 'Fort Scratchley a Living History' (Kerrigan 2008b). Both documentaries were made for visitors to the Fort Scratchley site.

Kerrigan's research was underpinned by Grierson's definition of documentary, which is the 'creative treatment of actuality' (1933, 8). The literature review investigated documentary 'creativity' and explained the objective of this research was to apply psychological approaches to creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1999) to documentary practice. Taking the System's Model of Creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999: 315) as her theoretical perspective Kerrigan used the framework of the three components of the model – Domain, Individual and Field as the foundation for the three self-reflective practice chapters. Using a learning journal, kept throughout the documentary production, and drawing on the documentaries themselves, Kerrigan examined her creative documentary process and confirmed her process was consistent with the theoretical approaches described in creative systems theory. Kerrigan's exegesis was 59,000 words and it provided an account of her documentary practice. She argues that

The exegesis discusses and analyses how creativity theories can be used to demystify creative documentary practice by deconstructing how I mediated external contexts, knowledges and skills, and drew on internalised and previously embodied knowledge throughout the production processes (Kerrigan in Kerrigan et al 2014, online).

Maher's research 'Noir and the Urban Imaginary' was conducted through the Creative Industries Faculty (CIF) at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). He received an Australian Postgraduate Award Scholarship for his PhD, which enquired into cinematic historiographies of the city and the role of filmmaking in contemporary place making. The film 'The Brisbane Line' (2011) (29 mins) was a hybrid documentary that used extensive still photographic assets. The written component was both a critical analysis and an exegesis that explored urban representation in Australian film and how that can be paralleled with film noir's relationship to Los Angeles.

Maher's exegetical component resulted in a 50,000 word thesis that mirrored conventional traditional theses with a comprehensive literature review, as well as chapter-based argument and discussion. The actual exegesis comprised a single critical and reflective analysis of the processes involved in the production and the practice leading the research. Maher argues that the research comprised both a practical and theoretical investigation where the 29 minute film functioned as Chapter Four in a five-chapter thesis analysis.

In my own research I found the separation between exegesis and thesis an impediment. The design of the research investigation was approached holistically and alternated across filmmaking practices, critical, theoretical and historical inquiry and critical reflection. The notion of 'practice-led' research was an established method across CIF but it did not reflect my research processes. The research unfolded in a much more fluid manner that saw my investigations enter cycles of reading and writing phases that would inform pre-production phases of the filmmaking, especially scriptwriting. Further periods of traditional research and data gathering would then commence and then break as film production commenced. A prolonged period prior to editing the film was then consumed by intensive thesis writing and critical reflection. Finally, post-production on the film commenced and simultaneous to this I was redrafting the thesis chapters. The constant cross-fertilization of ideas and processes could not, I found, be reduced to the descriptor of practice-led (Maher in Kerrigan et al 2014 online).

Sergi studied at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), with his Doctorate in Creative Arts titled 'At the Moment of Creation - An exploration of how directors know and assess screen performance' (2012). There were three films submitted with this DCA. The primary one was a short film titled 'Gingerbread Men' (2009) (29 min), another film contained research interviews (70 min) relating to the research questions and the third film was an additional feature film called '10 Days to Die' (87 min), which provided further insights into Sergi's practice and understanding of performance directing.

Sergi's 45,000 word exegesis contained a comprehensive literature review and numerous argumentative chapters. He asked the question 'how does a director comprehend and assess an actor's performance on set while the camera is rolling?' Sergi argues that

... a multi-disciplinary approach was adopted to answer the exegesis question, which was predominantly focused upon the naturalistic style of modern screen performance that has evolved from the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavski. I drew upon the work of several theorists and theoretical frameworks, including performance studies, cinema studies, tacit knowledge, creativity studies, cognitive science, neuroscience, embodied knowledge, psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, phenomenology, and empathetic projection to examine

the multiplicity of elements involved in a director comprehending and assessing actor performance (Sergi in Kerrigan et al 2014).

Wotherspoon's PhD, 'From Evidence To Screen: A model for producing educational content in the twenty first century' was undertaken at Flinders University. The PhD investigated the production of seven short documentaries about bullying in schools, for the resource 'Reducing bullying: evidence based strategies for schools' (Wotherspoon 2006), part of a larger multi-disciplinary research project. The films, with a total screen time of 51 minutes, are presented as a central chapter within a 39,000-word exegesis. Wotherspoon's PhD went through a number of ideations during its decade-long gestation. It began as a traditional thesis but shifted as she embarked on a creative and research collaboration with academics in the School of Education and realised that this research partnership was a suitable basis for a practice-led PhD. Consequently she became the first RHD candidate in the Department of Screen Studies at Flinders University to undertake a creative PhD. Reflective practice (Schön 1983) and participatory action research (Wadsworth 1998) were the methodologies that underpinned the work with the theoretical perspective being drawn from the notion of differing cultures (Shonkoff 2000) and international examples of best practice and successful interventions in school bullying (Ttofi and Farrington 2009). Wotherspoon notes that

The films were completed in the first part of my candidature. During the production process I began to struggle with what an exegesis was and what form mine would take. The exegesis presents a case study that focuses on the production of the resource, reflects on educational content production and forms the basis for a production model to produce educational content in the twenty-first century within universities (Wotherspoon in Kerrigan et al 2014, online).

In summary, these investigations of filmmaking as screen production research were framed by each institution's doctoral guidelines, which insist on an explicit connection between the creative product and the written component (exegesis or dissertation). However, there were significant variations between the guidelines, with written word lengths ranging from 30,000 to 60,000 words, the number of examiners inconsistent (two or three), while one university also required a presentation as part of the examination process. These variations significantly influenced the individual research undertaken. The authors support the claim by Webb, Brien, and Burr that 'the variation across programs and universities is potentially damaging to scholarly rigour and consistency in the field' (2013 6). Their report makes the point that standards are not the same as standardisation, certainly in relation to the creative work (Webb, Brien, and Burr 2013, 44). However, if only in developing higher

standards around examination, the benefits of consistent expectations and requirements in the screen production doctorate seem to clearly outweigh the attachment of individual institutions to a particular model for a doctorate by creative project. What should be uniting these doctoral works are not guidelines but sound methodological approaches to screen production enquiry.

Methodologies in the Creative Arts

In Australia, creative practice doctorates like the ones undertaken by the authors have been offered since 1984 (Candy 2006, 4). These degrees began their evolution in the UK in the late 1970's (Harper 2005, 80) with Susan Tebby submitting a PhD that included an exhibition and a full set of 35mm slides that were bound with her thesis (Tebby 1983), a doctorate that was examined 'based on the artworks and the written thesis together' (Candy 2006, 4).

An early example of a qualitative research enquiry into filmmaking practice can be found in Silverstone's work in the UK. In 1985 he conducted an anthropological study on the production of a BBC science documentary 'A New Green Revolution' (Silverstone 1985). Silverstone's ethnographic methodology used a participant observation method as he accompanied the film's producer during the two-year production of the one-hour film. Silverstone argues it would have been difficult for the research participant/filmmaker to take on both roles of practitioner and researcher, claiming that as an ethnographer he was more objective '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?"' (Silverstone 1985, 203). Silverstone's approach is worth noting, although with the widespread use of auto-ethnography today it is an argument less commonly made.

Over the last decade other scholars have undertaken various forms of qualitative research into screen production: Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011), looking at employment issues affecting media workers; Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell (2009) taking an interdisciplinary approach to the cultural practices of media production; Caldwell (2008) looking specifically at the Hollywood system of filmmaking; and Dawson and Holmes (2012) arguing for a global perspective in examining the 'complex social division of labour' in the contemporary film industry (14). The difference between the research in these texts and what is presented through the five doctorates in this study is the employment of practice-led approaches to explore filmmaking as a creative activity that is focused on a research enquiry.

Practice-led research in the fields of art and design has been defined as

firstly research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners (Gray 1996, 3).

Gray argues that practice-led research is 'simultaneously generative and reflective' (1996, 10), while Haseman, in proposing a performative research manifesto, presents a research paradigm that embraces practice-led research where the practice is 'primary not an optional extra' (Haseman 2008, 103). Haseman states that 'performative researchers progress their studies by employing variations of: reflective practice, participant observation, performance, ethnography, ethnodrama, biographical/autobiographical/narrative inquiry, and the inquiry cycle from action research' (2008, 104).

Screen production research is a mode of enquiry that shares some features but is also distinct from these other forms of creative arts and broader social science research. A social science methodology such as auto-ethnography addresses the challenges of researcher and participant being the same person, a situation common to many filmmaker/researchers. Action research has much to offer screen production research with its recognition of the iterative cycles of practice and reflection long embedded in the filmmaking process. Reflective practice approaches have also been commonly used throughout art and design research fields, including screen production, acknowledging the desire in this field to acquire knowledge through, rather than about, practice. However, there does not appear to be at this stage a distinct methodology sufficient to capture the complexities of the screen production enquiry process.

Screen production ontology and epistemology

Each researcher's ontological position is informed by their worldview. There are a wide variety of ontological positions, which can lead to different research results (Grix, 2004, 60). 'Ontology and epistemology are to research what "footings" are to a house: they form the foundations of the whole edifice' (Grix 2004, 57). The ontological position of the researcher should be made transparent as it explains how they understand reality.

Ontology relates to how we understand the nature of reality...epistemology refers to a theory of knowledge. It is related to ontology in that the nature of the reality you set out to explore influences the sort of knowledge that you can have of it...methodological implications follow (Ruddock, 2001: 27).

The research framework proposed by Grix (figure 1) presents the relationship between ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods and sources.

Figure 1 - The interrelationship between the building blocks of research from 'The Foundations of Research' (Grix 2004, 66).

Methodologies, or 'how we go about acquiring knowledge', provide a transparent and transferable approach to all research inquiries. Each methodology describes how the knowledge will be acquired using one or two (or more) precise methods, which lay out a procedure that is used to acquire new knowledge. This new knowledge is collected as evidence from one or multiple sources; all these components form part of the research inquiry. When laid out using this framework it is possible to defend subjective approaches to research. For example two methods might be used, that of reflective practice and filmmaking, those two methods are evidenced through a learning journal and a film. Using these types of sources to collect evidence of a screen practitioner's research enquiry can be justified through a few existing methodologies like Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Wadsworth 1998) or Practitioner Based Enquiry (PBE) (Murray and Lawrence 2000). Methodological defences of subjective research are becoming more common in practice-led research fields.

Practice-led research uses a different ontology to scientific research, which takes a positivist approach (Grix 2004: p. 61) called foundationalism. Anti-foundationalism is one of the ontologies that supports creative practice-led research where 'reality' is socially and discursively 'constructed' by human actors' (2004: p. 61). This ontology can lead to a constructionist epistemology that explains '...all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world' (Crotty 1998, 42). These opposing ontological positions of foundationalism and anti-foundationalism illustrate the issue experimental sciences have with practice-led

research, which is attacked for being too subjective. Gray defends the subjective position of the practitioner-researcher because

‘reflexivity is acknowledged; the interaction of the researcher with the research material is recognised. Knowledge is negotiated (intersubjective?), context bound, and is as a result of personal construction. Research material may not necessarily be replicated, but can be made accessible, communicated and understood. This requires the methodology to be explicit and transparent (documentation is essential) and transferable in principle (if not specifics) (*sic*) (Gray 1996, 13)

The last decade of creative practice research has seen sound and transferable creative practice methodologies emerge (Webb, Brien and Burr, 2013) but these methodologies should not be confused with theoretical perspectives. A researcher’s theoretical perspective is ‘the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria’ (Crotty 1998: 3). Confusing and collapsing methodologies with theoretical perspectives may occur. To avoid this type of confusion, robust research frameworks (Crotty, 1998, Grix 2004) can be drawn on to defend self-observational and self-reflective approaches to screen production enquiries.

Similarly, Sinnerbrink provides an ontological defence for a collaborative, relativist, art-based ontology that could be used by a screen practitioner. His overview of recent and historical debates about the ontology of film are worth noting because they draw attention to the difficulties in reaching a clear and consistent position: ‘film is inherently plural, hybrid, with myriad, sometimes conflicting aesthetic possibilities’ (2011, 44). The medium’s ability to incorporate images, sound and most of the other creative arts, deal with narrative, express emotion and implicate the viewer in the ambiguities of photographic representation all create challenges for its role in academic research concerned with questions of knowledge: ‘This is why arguments over the ontology of the moving image and the question of the aesthetics of film remain so intractable’ (Sinnerbrink 2011, 44). These challenges should not, however, dissuade researchers from making attempts to demystify the complex social, cultural and individual processes that relate to film and filmmaking.

An emerging methodology: Screen Production Enquiry

Methodological statements used in doctorates should describe and defend each candidate’s ontological and epistemological approaches so that direct connection between them and the chosen methodologies, methods and sources of data (Crotty 1998, 2; Grix 2004, 66) can be confirmed as being internally consistent (McIntyre

2006). Screen production as academic research is still in its infancy and each doctorate included in this study articulated the use of a different methodology. However, they have all used filmmaking as a method to investigate screen production research questions. Because of this common method, it is possible to compare the methodological approaches to determine how they helped each researcher acquire knowledge about filmmaking.

Berkeley devoted a considerable section of the exegesis to a discussion of methodology, including how he investigated social science and fine art approaches to research, especially action research and auto-ethnography. Berkeley argues

I was particularly drawn to two theorists, Pierre Bourdieu and Donald Schön, who had written about the epistemological specificity of practice as a form of knowledge. I described my methodology as reflective practice, with the principal reflective methods being a research diary and a 'making of' video. Feedback activities included work-in-progress screenings and a review of the multiple iterations of the edit (Berkeley in Kerrigan et al 2014, online).

Using reflective practice for Berkeley was possible because he had considerable prior experience as an independent filmmaker before embarking on his PhD.

I saw the project as building on an existing body of creative practice and the initial focus of the research was on surfacing and articulating the tacit knowledge in that practice [Schön 1983] (Berkeley in Kerrigan et al 2014 online).

Berkeley's exegesis was significant because he proposed a methodology for research that emerged during the production of the film *How To Change The World*. This methodology involved developing an understanding of the practitioner's identity through an analysis of their dispositions and positions within the field of screen production (Bourdieu 1993, 61), then examining how that identity is evidenced in the decision-making that occurs in the production process.

Kerrigan's methodology was Practitioner Based Enquiry (PBE) (Murray and Lawrence 2000), which is similar to auto-ethnography because it allows for the interrogation of filmmaking practices. Kerrigan explored the relationship between documentary practice and creativity using reflective practice (Schön 1987, 26) that can be expanded upon by Cowan's concept of *reflection-for-action* (1998, 37). Kerrigan argues

I identified methods for collecting data to reveal each of the three reflective stages of: in, on and for action, from within the documentary production context because some months passed between the filmmaking practice and the analysis of my own documentary practice. To assist in the process I collected 'data' from my own creative process. The primary form of evidence was the reflective journal that was kept throughout the phases of production. The filmmaking activities revealed in the journal were verified through other production paperwork (Kerrigan in Kerrigan et al 2014).

PBE provided an opportunity for Kerrigan to reflect on the practice she was engaged in during her PhD as well as the many layers of tacit knowledge and practice that she had embodied throughout her television production career at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Maher used traditional research methods, based in established qualitative approaches to test, adapt and apply urban theoretical approaches associated with the Los Angeles School of Urban Studies, genre theory and film history. Maher's thesis 'pursues new theoretical understandings of how historicisation of the city can be approached through cinema and how this can be actively and creatively applied through a filmmaking practice' (Maher 2010, 16). Maher explains his approach:

Central to creative practice research is the production of a creative artefact and one of my key aims was to ensure it was the kind of creative artefact that would optimize the commercial free constraints supported by doctoral level research. As an established filmmaker I aimed to embrace new ways and modes of filmmaking to produce a text that was an irrevocable component of a larger research project (Maher in Kerrigan et al 2014).

Maher used a critical reflective process where he did a textual and comparative analysis over a prolonged period prior to editing the film. His analysis utilized a formulation of Third Space theory by Edward Soja. Originating in urban studies but combining elements like social geography and literary theory, Third Space reconfigures the role of texts in relationship to notions of place and place-making and it offered the basis on which to apply a new filmmaking practice. Maher pursued a 'practice of urban theory' (Maher 2010, 23) making a research innovation that relied heavily on his filmmaking practice.

Sergi's research topic was informed by his professional work as a drama director on long-running television serials and films. While Sergi's methodology was not

explicitly articulated in his exegesis, there is an acknowledgement of the employment of reflective practice methods. An extract from Sergi's exegesis describes some 'writer's block' issues he was facing (2012, 27) and here he draws on the work of Schön

A gap exists between learned professional knowledge and the complexity of problems that confront practitioners – in my case, a director/writer with many years of professional experience. Schön states, 'the problems of real-world practice do not present themselves to practitioners as well-formed structures. Indeed they tend not to present themselves as problems at all but as messy indeterminate situations' (Schön 1987, 4 as quoted in Sergi, 2012, 27).

Sergi's embodied professional filmmaking practices provided a framework for his self-reflective examination of his own performance as a drama director. This mirrors the more methodologically explicit approaches used by Berkeley, Kerrigan and Wotherspoon, who used the work of Schön (1983, 1987) to defend their self-reflective, auto-ethnographic and participatory action research approaches.

Wotherspoon focused her research on the rarely described complex decision-making processes of a documentary director. She was able to do this because the larger research project on School Bullying provided qualitative and quantitative evidence that underpinned the documentary content. This enabled Wotherspoon to use a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology to focus her research enquiry on the collaborative production environment created by the larger research project. PAR is defined as

research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it. They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, economic, geographic and other contexts that make sense of it (Wadsworth 1998).

PAR and the work of Shonkoff (2000) offered a way for Wotherspoon to examine the challenges that occur when making educational documentaries, especially those that are commissioned. In her exegesis she argues

The filmmaker's role on this project was to navigate diplomatically between academia, policy and practice, working as an interpreter and using my own expertise and practice to produce a useable and applied outcome. Edwards's work, based on the findings of Nutley, stresses the importance of dissemination, interaction, and social

influence for 'improving the use of research' (Edwards 2001, 58-59). Filmmakers, and other educational content creators, have the expertise and skills to translate and disseminate knowledge so that research outcomes do impact on the wider public (Wotherspoon 2011, 55).

In summary, each doctorate used a different methodology (such as PAR, PBE, reflective or critical practice). However, the authors see little point in arguing that one of these methodologies is more suited to screen production research than another. Different methodological terminology has been used to describe a similar activity, an approach to research enquiry that supports screen production as a primary method to acquire new knowledge about screen practice and filmmaking. What we are interested in doing is identifying the transferable elements of these broader methodological approaches that allowed the researchers to undertake a similar line of research enquiry through the making of a film. The common elements identified have to be the use of reflective practice or critical reflections on practice, combined with the iterative cycles that correspond to the common stages of the filmmaking process – pre-production, production and post-production.

The practice and reflection involved in this research approach aims to obtain knowledge of the hybrid and plural qualities of film ontology (Sinnerbrink 2011) in variously exploring the social, cultural, creative, technical, performative, professional, audiovisual, material and/or other dimensions of the practice. While it is neither necessary nor desirable to argue for a unified methodological approach to screen production research, a clearly articulated rationale for how the filmmaking process can be undertaken to produce valid knowledge claims would benefit the increasing number of doctoral and other researchers in this discipline. Further work analysing screen production doctorates needs to be undertaken by the discipline to achieve this outcome.

Generating new knowledge through Screen Production Enquiry

All forms of screen production enquiry need to generate new knowledge. As Webb, Brien, and Burr articulate in the report 'Examination of doctoral degrees in creative arts: process, practice and standards', the focus in doctoral study must be on research training and the generation of original contributions to knowledge (2013, 18-19). Combined, these five doctorates have generated 48 individual research outputs through published journal articles, conference proceedings and non-traditional research outputs. Worth noting is the prolific output of Wotherspoon, who has co-authored 21 research outputs including a co-authored book and six iterations of the

educational content model. Details on each candidate's outputs and contribution to the screen production discipline can be found in the blog (Kerrigan, S., L. Berkeley, S. Maher, M. Sergi, and A. Wotherspoon 2014) under each author's section.

These research outputs demonstrate how filmmaking as a primary research method can generate new knowledge that is recognized within the discipline, the wider academic community and beyond. For an academic discipline still in its infancy, this validation of the research supports the development of the screen production doctorate as a distinct field within the creative arts and the argument for further clarifying the nature of research undertaken in this way, an objective this article has sought to contribute to.

Conclusion

It is clear to the five filmmaker/academics in this paper that the identity of the screen production doctorate continues to be a work-in-progress. Its relatively brief history largely explains this but there is a need for intellectual and institutional work to better define what a PhD and/or DCA in filmmaking involves. As Webb, Brien, and Burr (2013) argue, greater consistency in degree requirements should not affect the diversity and creativity of the film works being produced but will support students, supervisors and examiners in navigating an often uncertain research terrain.

A significant element in the development of screen production as an academic research discipline is greater clarity in relation to methodology, to ensure that research enquiry undertaken through the production of a film can produce valid knowledge claims. Methodologies developed in the social sciences and creative arts have varying degrees of relevance for screen production research. As argued here these methodologies have been able to capture the ontological and epistemological complexities of each individual enquiry. Transferable methods within these methodologies that are common to the five doctorates involved have been identified but it requires further investigation before arguing whether a specific methodology for screen production enquiry has value for the discipline. 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. This paper has presented evidence of the diversity of ways that the production of a film conceived as a research method can be explored. However, we argue that this diversity reflects the hybrid and plural ontology of the film medium (Sinnerbrink 2011) and that more work needs to be

done to define a distinct methodology that can be widely used for the purposes of undertaking a screen production enquiry.

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ⁱ See www.aspera.org.au for more details

ⁱⁱ The AQF states that a doctoral degree 'qualifies individuals who apply a substantial body of knowledge to research, investigate and develop new knowledge, in one or more fields of investigation, scholarship or professional practice. (AQF 2013: 64)

ⁱⁱⁱ Of the 86 Screen Production PhDs there were 64 fulltime and 22 part-time candidates. With the DCAs there were 19 fulltime and 17 part-time candidates.

^{iv} At the Masters level there were 63 full time and 18 part-time candidates