

ASSESSING IMAGE-BASED TEXTS

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MEDIA ARTS CONGRESS



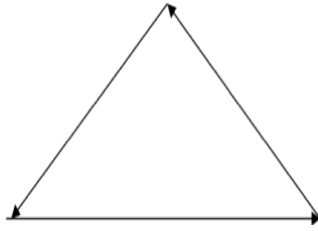
DIEGETIC LIFE FORM AND DIEGETIC LOGIC

ASSESSING
IMAGE-BASED SCHOLARSHIP

It is appropriate to start this paper by noting that this conference arises from and is intimately connected with the Australian Teaching and Learning Council (ALTC) funded grant project entitled “Assessing of Graduate Screen Production Outputs in Nineteen Australian Film Schools”.¹

This project will test the assessment skills of 25 Australian screen production academics from five states, using a sample of 45 Honours productions completed in the last seven years. Creative works alone will be assessed without any written components or exegeses. There will also be a control group of five international assessors, most probably from the UK. The aim is to accumulate a body of evidence that will demonstrate, in quantitative and qualitative terms, that assessment of image-based creative works is as consistent as assessment conducted in traditional discipline areas.

CONSULTATIONS: We are now in the first stage of the project when we invite commentary about all issues related to the assessment process in screen production – hence this conference. We have with us assessment coordinators from all five states as well as our international guest from the UK, all of whom are presenting papers. No doubt we are eager to hear what they have to say. The aim of my own paper is to address the overarching agenda for the conference from the point of view of the ALTC project. More importantly I hope to elicit some responses from you either at this conference or some time in the future. We could even stop now and hear what some of you have to say.



I have often found that a good way of eliciting innovative responses in my production workshops is by creating a disruption of some kind. So let me start a small disruption here by offering you this triangle shape while you do some creative contemplating. The above shape reflects my fondness for triangles and, as you will see shortly, I will use this figure quite a few times during this presentation. But just now I would like you to think of the above shape as representing the three corners of a dialectic with the arrows leading from thesis to antithesis to synthesis.² The dialectical process is a most efficient way of creating a disruption as it invites us to consider a position opposite to the one under consideration. I would now like to do this with the theme of this conference: if the conference is bound up with the importance of assessment then let me – if only for a moment – take up an antithetical position and state that as the leader of a Priority Assessment ALTC grant project I have a very limited interest in assessment as such. I could push this disruption a little further and suggest that most of us in the creative arts sector have a limited interest in assessment! Do we?

SCREEN PRODUCTION ASSESSMENT: While you are thinking about this let me quickly follow my dialectical antithesis with a caveat and a synthesis: my lack of interest in the conventional assessment process is not due to my indifference towards assessment. Like most screen production academics I generally urge students to seek excellence in their productions and aim to win awards – for most students winning an award is considered as a penultimate form of assessment. Urging students to aspire to excellence is natural to us. It comes with our production methodology, which entails an implicit form of assessment that comes with a series of deadlines. This type of assessment is bound up with a complex feedback loop between producers and all those that participate in the production process. The feedback that producers receive may come from potential audiences, actors, crew, staff, other students, technical staff, other teachers, professionals, documentary subjects, funding agencies and clients. This feedback takes place at every stage of the process and is intricately bound up with the learning process, but is not an assessment of learning in a conventional sense of the word. To a naive observer it may not even seem like an assessment. Rather, the feedback process may appear as sharing of knowledge amongst all those that participate in the process. This sharing may involve negotiating craft related information, promises made to friends and participants, credits, clearances, contracts and obligations negotiated according to ethical principles, as happens in life itself. As our productions often take place outside the narrow confines of our institutions, we could, in a manner of speaking, say that our students get assessed not only by us but also by the wider world around them. Broadly speaking this assessment process works well and among our colleagues we are generally quite consistent with the marks we assign to our students' work.

In this context we could boast, if we wanted to, that conventional academia has much to learn from our enlightened approach to knowledge, scholarship, assessment and

learning. The evidence for the success of our assessment methods is there for all to see. The work of our students – even that produced at the undergraduate level – goes out to national and international forums. It is immediately relevant and useful and has an impact. Our students also seem to relate to their productions with an intensity that is quite different from that of students who produce essays in conventional undergraduate courses, which generally remain unseen and unread.

THE PROBLEM: If all of this is true and we have an enlightened assessment methodology, what then is this grant about? What is this conference all about? The answer I can give you is in some respects straightforward and most of you in Australia know it already, but let me formalize it with a three-line back-story that begins not so much with assessment matters but with research related issues:

- 2001 Creative Arts accepted as an Australian Research Council (ARC) research category.³
- 2001 Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) begins collecting creative arts research publication outputs used to calculate the federal block grant funding allocation to Australian universities.⁴
- 2001 DEST gives up collecting creative arts publication data because they found the evaluation and the classification of creative works too difficult to handle.

The fact that DEST did not collect our creative research outputs before and after 2001 means that our institutions did not receive any block grant funding for these works. This has all kinds of consequences for our teaching and for our research, one consequence being that our sector is in many ways fiscally invisible within our own institutions. Consequently we always need to plead for funds, which according to DEST-like estimates, we have not earned.

Little has changed in Australia since 2001. For a while Research Quality Framework (RQF) offered the possibility that things would change for the better.⁵ Following some strenuous lobbying from our peak body, the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERE), as well as from other creative arts groups, our sector was given an assessment panel of its own albeit with architecture and the built environment.⁶

RQF came and went and has now been replaced by Excellence of Research in Australia (ERA). DEST was replaced by DEEWR (The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) and then by DIISR (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research) and still no one knows what to do with our practice-based research outputs even though creative works are now recognized as a research category.⁷ This situation presents our sector with an ongoing institutional problem that we need to do something about. While this issue is very important it is not the issue I wish to deal with today. Rather, it is the difficulty that DEST, ARC and others have with the classification and evaluation of our work that is of interest to me; it typifies the response that academia as a whole still has towards our type of scholarship. Why, for example, did it take more than one hundred years since the inception of the cinema for creative works to be accepted as a research category, when the importance of image-based communication in contemporary life is readily self-evident everywhere?

In passing, we should note that ERA seems to be sympathetic to our sector. Perhaps when it is fully functional ERA will deliver the long-awaited recognition of our work. We can only wait in hope. ERA is presently undertaking a test audit of our sector and we will probably find out quite soon where we stand.⁸ If ERA turns out to be a positive development for us, its future audits are likely to operate on a very low budget. This most likely means that they will collect future publication data from us if our data is easy to compile and easy to assess. They are also likely to accept proxy measures of quality from our sector if these are robust proxies.

Our sector, in turn, can provide robust proxies if we can give a:

- convincing description of the scholarship that we are assessing
- clear description of criteria and standards
- consistent assessment procedure
- transparent peer review process
- good comparative publication index to compare creative outputs with conventional publication outputs.

Hence one reason for the existence of this assessment project is to explain what it is that we are doing to institutions such as DIISR and ARC who don't quite understand what it is that we do but appear willing to listen and learn from us. A subsidiary aim of the project is to provide evidence that ASPERA's Peer Review assessors can provide robust and consistent measures of quality.⁹

The question that is implicit in this enterprise is as follows: **What is it about our discipline that makes it difficult for conventional academia to accept our peer assessment as straightforward?** We could extend this question in a whole series of questions:

- Can we describe image-based scholarship in a way that is consistent with the methodology of conventional axiomatic and objective scholarship?
- What does it mean to write with images in academia at undergraduate, Honours and Postgraduate level?
- How do we assess this creative type of writing and how do we arrange academic regulations to moderate the assessment process?
- Can we do all this without undercutting the essential creativity of our programs?

Attempting to give answers to all these questions requires a major undertaking. My paper today can only touch upon a few salient points which of necessity need to be quite general. I will begin by defining the limits of the image-based text I will be considering in this ALTC funded assessment project.

LIMITS: Images contribute to conventional scholarship in many ways. Images are often used to complement a written text to demonstrate some aspect of the text. The written text, in turn, provides a context for the viewing of the image and without this context the image would not be fully decipherable. The use of images in this manner does not present us with an assessment problem and these demonstrative images are readily accepted by existing academic regulations. Nothing more needs to be said

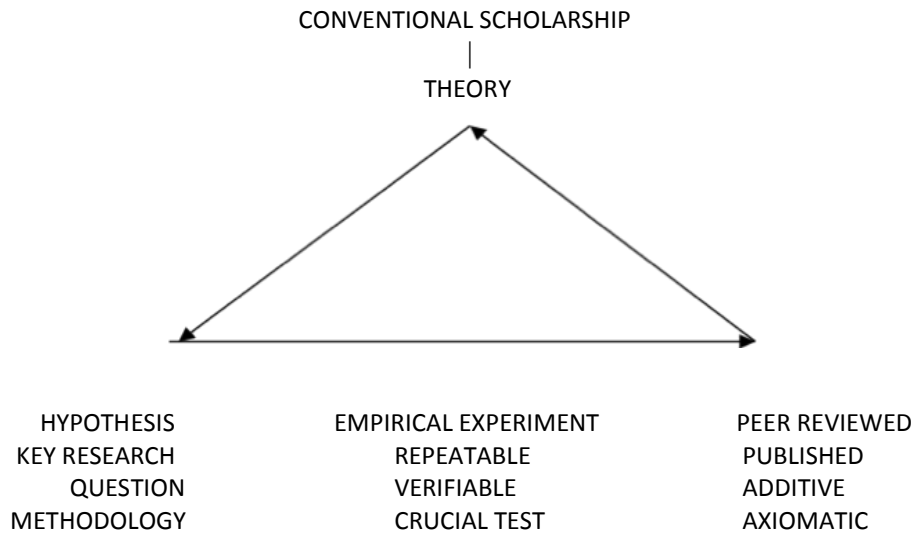
about this except to say that some image-making requires a written component or an exegesis to complete the meaning of the work.¹⁰

IMAGE-THESIS: The focus of this paper and of the ALTC funded project is not on visual texts that depend on written texts, rather it is on the image-texts that are themselves the primary vehicle of a canonical message or a thesis. With canonical visual texts the message and its context are explicit in the text itself – the work speaks for itself. In the ideal case such an image-text does not need any words to complement its message. More importantly words may not be able to adequately describe the image-text as each element of the image may have multiple meanings and be worth “thousands of words”. Nor does one require an authoritative written critique to initiate the next round of creative activity. One simply creates another visual text in response to an earlier one. YouTube output directs us to this kind of development. Although this type of scholarship is still somewhat rare within academia today there is an emerging interest in its development if only because the number of postgraduates in this sector is increasing. In a world that depends so much on images, such texts will inevitably grow in number.

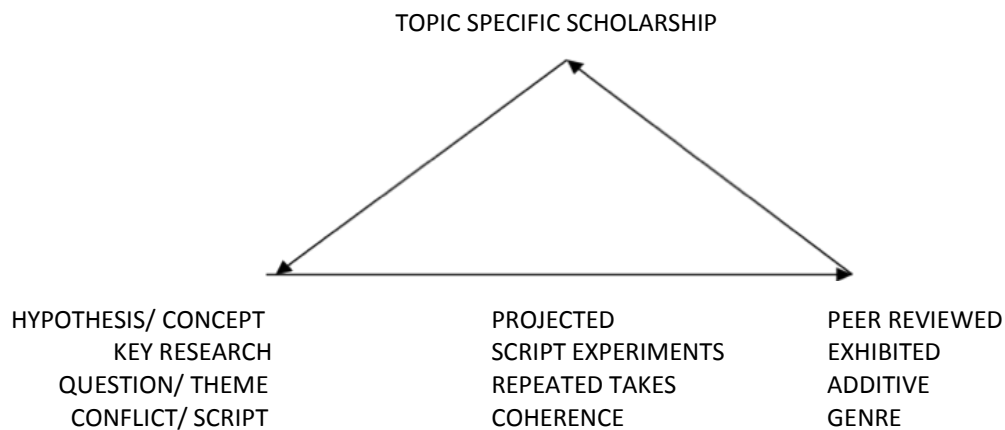
Fortunately for our assessment project, Honours students generally produce short productions that are self-contained and are sent to festivals with minimal context. It is this type of work that will be sent to the national and the international assessors to assess. The sample of 45 such short productions will be assessed without any other contextual material or writing.

A number of questions immediately come to mind: Are these Honours productions legitimate scholarly texts with legitimate scholarly methodologies? Do they perform the same task as word-based texts but only do it differently? Do they perform the scholarly task better or worse? What are the advantages and disadvantages of producing image-based texts over written texts? What can we say about this paradigm of scholarship in general and how different is this from conventional scholarship?¹¹ The best way of dealing with these questions is to first consider the conventional paradigm of scholarship about which we know a lot already.

DIEGETIC SCHOLARSHIP: Conventional scholarship is intrinsically diegetic. That is to say, it is an intentional narrative which outlines some reasoned, theoretical, logical and linear argument using words and symbols.¹² As a reasoned linguistic narrative we can also say that conventional scholarship is reflective and arises from our reflections, abstractions and from the interiority of our thoughts. Conventional scholarship also arises from and is contextualized by some developing body of theory. Before any such theoretical explanation can be accepted as valid it has to be tested and verified experimentally. The experiment should be clear, factual, objective, evidence-based, repeatable and non-trivial in so far that the theory cannot be correct at all times and in all circumstances. A good theory must be falsifiable if it is to be a theory at all. A good experiment should account for a “crucial test” that can also prove the theory to be wrong. The experiment itself should give rise to observables that can be analysed using a verifiable regime of truth and falsity. The outcome of such an experiment – no matter if it affirms or negates the hypothesis – will add to our stock of knowledge if it is accepted by a body of peers and published.¹³ The scheme for conventional scholarship could be depicted in a simplified triangle form as follows:



PRE-PRODUCTION SCHOLARSHIP: The preparation for the production takes place during the pre-production period when the script and the project itself are being finalized. Much of this work involves conventional type of research, forward projections and conceptual abstractions. For example, the scripting process must arrange all the available information in a way that will be easily accessible to the audience. The narrative needs to be simple and clear as we cannot stop a production mid-stream and think about things in a way that we can do when we read a book; the relentless unfolding of the production is quite unforgiving to muddled logic. All of this needs to be abstracted and projected forward in time before the production starts. The regime of scholarship for this stage of the production process is not all that different from the conventional scheme of scholarship outlined above:



PRODUCTION PRACTICE: While there is much conventional research that takes place before the production begins, it is important to remember that films are never made in the pre-production but in the production and the post-production stages of the production process. Something altogether new happens once the production gets underway. This is because the productions are “written” primarily using images and not abstract language symbols and, importantly, images are not arbitrary bits of information but in some sense are an element of our actuality.

MIMETIC IMAGES: In contrast to the diegetic character of the conventional scholarship images are intrinsically mimetic, iconic, perceptual, sensuous and

kinetic.¹⁴ Images are external to us and in many respects are an element of our perceptual exteriority. Images are not read, nor in the first instance do they narrate, but are perceived and experienced by the viewer. As an experience there is always something unspoken and unconscious about images. We also experience images through multiple codes – images are polysemic and polymorphous. Many of these codes are in place before we enter into language and before we are fully aware of who we are. Language is not required to apprehend images. Almost everything living in the animal world can apprehend images. To an extent images are pre-linguistic, spontaneous and reflex-bound. We apprehend them viscerally, and with a semiotics that is outside codes of our culture. Such a primary semiotics includes a play of light and darkness, spectacle and enchantment of colours and shapes, rhythmical and rhyming sounds, babbling, music, movement, chants, trance to name a few.¹⁵ Much of this early relationship with the image is unpredictable, spontaneous, subjective, unconscious, non-linear and associative rather than logical. Images at this stage of development are not subject to truth or falsity. Images just are and in some essential way are beyond morality and reason.

Once we grow up and begin to use words these early characteristics of the image are not lost.¹⁶ We still associate images with something that comes before reason and something that is potentially immature. We give images to children before they can read. Images are generally associated with bodies and not thought. If we want to negate someone we can generally do so by reducing them to their appearances and specifically to the appearance of their bodies. In the first instance, we still respond to images phenomenologically and instinctively rather than logically, and this is especially so with gendered images.

There is also a flipside to this negative judgement: if our culture presents images as subservient to thought it also presents them as being all-powerful. Images come to us as signifiers of desire, desiring bodies, passion and appetite.

ART PRACTICE: The mimetic characteristics of images are fundamental to the practice of the visual arts – images are the semiotic substance of the visual arts. Many artists endorse the mimetic, chaotic, pre-linguistic, unconscious and spontaneous aspects of the image and resist any input of reason to it. Dadaists and neo-Dadaists are a good example of this tendency.¹⁷

ART SCHOLARSHIP: Almost by definition art scholarship must combine the diegesis of conventional scholarship with the mimetic qualities of the visual medium. Here lies the problem: artistic texts based on sensuality, phenomenology, passion and desire sit uneasily within conventional academia and have done so for a long time. An older manifestation of this art/ scholarship dichotomy is represented by the two ancient Greek deities: Dionysus and Apollo.¹⁸ In the original representation Apollo is the god of illuminating reason and someone we can associate with conventional scholarship. The qualities of Dionysus, in contrast, are consistent with art-like characteristics. Dionysus is amoral, uninhibited, spontaneous, sensuous and desiring. He is driven by animal-like passion expressed by dissolving intoxication, unconsciousness, enchantment, trance, dancing and chanting. If we want to know why conventional academia has problems with image-based text the answer is to found here: Dionysian attributes of the image are considered to be incompatible with the

requirements of conventional Apollonian scholarship as depicted in the oppositional scheme below:

| REASON | ART | |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| APOLLO | | DIONYSUS |
| DIEGESIS | MIMESIS | |
| Conscious | Unconscious | Intoxicated |
| Logical | Phenomenological | Sensuous |
| Narrative | Iconic | Desiring |
| Conceptual | Perceptual | Experiential |
| Interiority | Exteriority | Dissolving |
| Signifying/meaning-based | Effects-based | Instinct-based |
| Reasoned | Poetic | Ecstatic |
| Mind | Body | Appetite |
| Linguistic | Pre-linguistic | Animal |
| Reflective | Kinetic/ Musical | Dancing/ Chanting |
| Rule-bound | Chaotic | Unpredictable |
| Ethical | Amoral | Uninhibited |
| Objective | Subjective | Instinctive |
| Linear | Non-linear | Rhizomatic |
| Contextual | Associative | Spontaneous |
| Additive | Lifelike | Rhythmical |
| Axiomatic | Imitative | Symbiotic |
| Evidence-based | Form-based | Reflex |
| Syllogistic | Effect-based | Appetite-based |
| Rational | Irrational | Emotional |
| Verifiable | Repetitive | Entranced |
| Peer refereed | Repressed | Sacrificed |
| And published | Latent | Metamorphosed |

APOLLO+DIONYSUS: Given the above characteristics of the image, it is not surprising that art practice and conventional scholarship have had an interesting and at times troubled relationship. This division between the two has been in place for a very long time but most notably so in the post-Newtonian period when analytical procedures came to dominate the discourse of knowledge.¹⁹ The existence of this division, however, only tells us half the story regarding the relationship between art and scholarship. Rivers of ink have been spent trying to elaborate on this relationship. While many empirical philosophers confirm and endorse the simple separation between science and art, many others have sought to dissolve the simplicity of this dichotomy.²⁰

Some writers define the practice of art itself as attempts to reconcile Apollo with Dionysus. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* is one of the most influential examples of this type of mediation.²¹ Although Nietzsche appreciates the rational qualities of Apollo, for him it is the intoxicated and instinctive Dionysian who holds the essential human qualities. Dionysus is sensuous, he feels everything, he wants and desires. Apollo has qualities of self-awareness and reason but without Dionysus, Apollo would feel nothing and think of nothing. Without Dionysus, Apollo would be someone akin to a machine-accountant. More importantly it is Dionysus that holds the

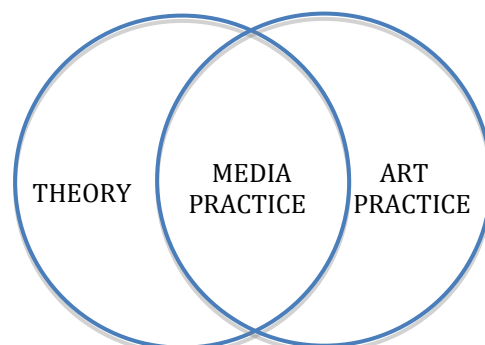
secret of the unconscious elements of existence – if only he were not intoxicated he could tell us. Dionysus holds the secrets to all the known unknowns as well as unknown unknowns – if only he could be made conscious and self-aware. Dionysus holds the secrets of life and death itself – if only he could speak clearly. For all these reason Apollo and Dionysus need one another. For all their differences Dionysus needs Apollo’s awareness and Apollo needs the sensibility of Dionysus.²²

The entangled relationship between Apollo and Dionysus is of interest to our sector as it has the potential to invoke all the contradictions that have a bearing on our existence, contradictions which manifest themselves as oppositions between: conscious/ unconscious, morality/ amorality, reason/ unreason, lawfulness/ unlawfulness, individual/ society, men/ women, present/ future, mortality/ immortal to name a few.

ADDITIVE ART PRACTICE: The relationship between Apollo and Dionysus has no limits, as would be expected of a relationship that deals with unfathomable aspects of existence. But this does not mean that the engagement of Apollo with Dionysus is inarticulate or essentially arbitrary, even though some artists tend to encourage an open ended delineation of their practice. Questioning how to make the unspoken speak, how to make it fit the world of rules and regulations, how to make it fit into rules of mortality, time, life and death may seem open-ended and infinite but this does not mean that we cannot give specific answers to specific situations or that the answers we give are not additive to our stock of knowledge. The additive element of our practice is evident in the prescription we often give to our students in our production classes, namely: “Don’t do anything that has been done before (unless you can do it better)!”

In this context art is no different from science, which also deals with open-ended problems related to our understanding of the material world. In essence both modes of scholarship arise from the same impetus. Only the domain may seem to be different. Art builds our understanding of the sensuous “subjective” world and science builds our understanding of the “objective” material world. In the limit case, one would want to argue, as does Foucault, that even this distinction dissolves away.²³

MEDIA-PRACTICE: Something similar can be said about media-practice and media scholarship. Image-based texts communicate with sensuality – mimetic and iconic elements are a necessary element of the filmic diegesis. In screen production we have diegetic reason that is informed by mimetic phenomenology and sensuality. Potentially media practice straddles conventional scholarship (theory) and art practice as in the diagram below. But only if we want it to do so by definition. Do we?



DEFINITION OF THE DISCIPLINE?: Image-based texts may be associated with art and art practice but does this mean that we must necessarily bring art into our discipline as a defining quality? Do we need to bring the unconscious mysteries of life and death in to our productions? There are many media-related activities that do not explicitly invoke art. For example mediated images are an element of broadcast journalism, television current affairs programs, news, chat shows, life-style programs, celebrity interviews, advertising, corporate videos; images are the foundation of much that is the computer, IT, simulation and games industries; images are used to communicate a plethora of disciplines from museum displays, ethnography, ancient history, medicine, biology, wildlife zoology, marine science, forensic science, and law to name a few. Do all these images belong to the discipline of screen production?

If we say yes we face the risk that every recorded, mediated, animated and rendered image will be an element of our discipline. Potentially there is a risk that our discipline will be defined by the audio-visual medium itself. Even CCTV recordings may have to be considered as an element of our discipline.

Historically, there has indeed been a tendency within academia to define our discipline as an audio-visual craft, probably because until quite recently created images were not all that plentiful. For example photographs that are older than 100 years are comparatively rare and moving pictures even more so. There is, however, no shortage of visual material at the present moment. Rather, the opposite is the case – images are to be found everywhere and on every topic. Not all of these images should be embraced by our discipline. For this reason it may be timely for us to reconsider the limits of what we do as a discipline. As a guess, this is likely to be a major topic of discussion for our sector in days ahead.

Personally, I would want to argue that art practice should be a necessary and a defining component of our discipline. Dionysus as well as Apollo should be in the content of our productions and we should assess productions by the extent they illuminate human experience first and foremost. In this perspective, image-based practice is neither conventional scholarship nor art practice but both and necessarily both – Diegetic + Mimetic. Furthermore, I also want to argue that this has always been the case in the dominant paradigm of screen production which models itself on cinema.

CINEMA: Dionysian practices may be rare in conventional academia but are all too common in the content of our screen where desire and enchantment mix so easily with reason, intentions, causality and the drama of the storyline. Dionysian-Apollonian entanglement provides the vital ingredient of every film's production in both fictional and non-fictional genres. Films are replete with cathartic heroes and villains that invoke the tragedy of the entanglement between Apollo and Dionysus. One cannot imagine a film – fictional or non-fictional – in which these conflicting tendencies are not present. Underneath it all one can most often discern attempts to illuminate some element of human existence, even when the process is cloaked as entertainment. How this exploration is carried out in practice is an all-important topic but one that is outside the scope of this paper. Suffice to say it is often the villains (and often disguised as heroes) that provide the vector for this exploration.

Specifically it is conflict with the unrestrained, unpalatable, uninhibited and amoral in our society that best illuminates the human condition.

AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY: The presence and absence of artistic merit may well seem like an ambiguous delineation for our discipline. Nevertheless it is a delineation that, in my opinion, can and should be made. The work of Peta Walter, who contributed the image on the cover page of our conference program, is a good case in point. An image from her short production *Tokyo Rose* is depicted below and I will use it to illustrate the salient point of this art-based definition.²⁴

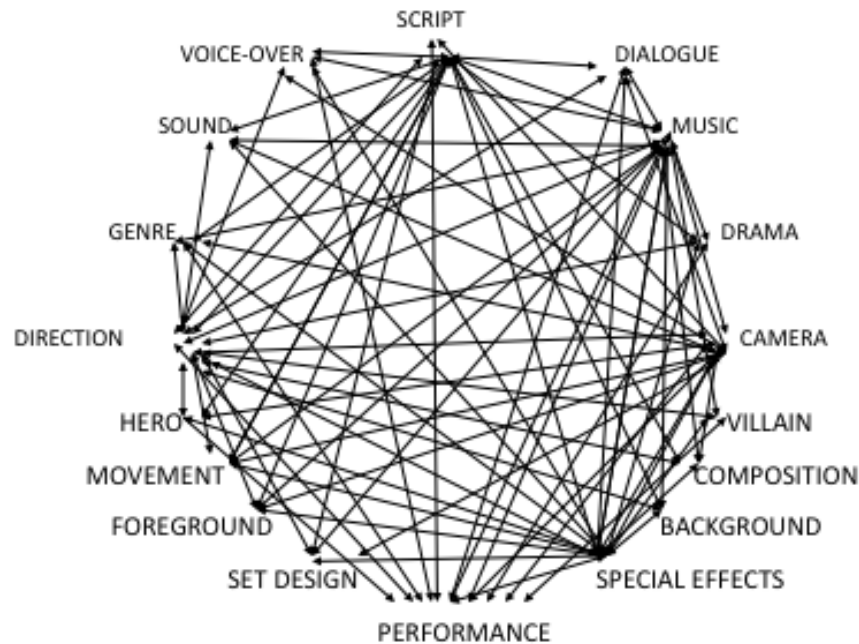


A viewer can appreciate various formal qualities of the above image and of the staged pose of this young woman staring obliquely at the camera lens somewhere in “exotic” Japan. There are all kinds of scholarships we can apply to this image to indicate the force it has on its viewers. One could describe it as a black-and-white photo-documentation of a cross-cultural activity, an example of creative industry, advertising industry or even ethnography. But none of these perspectives compares to the auto-ethnographic search of the artist herself who has spent a number of decades personally posing in front of the camera in various attires while attempting to

understand how she as a human being relates to the images by which her society so often portrays women. Her desire to illuminate this imaginary aspect of her life has no limit. Her search goes beyond the fashion pose and beyond cross-cultural interrogation, although these too are important. The mystery that underpins her need to know her place within her culture is in every sense consistent with the intention that underpins a work of art. Without such an art-based aspiration a production will be impoverished and will, arguably, be outside the range of our discipline.

PRACTITIONER-BASED METHODOLOGY: Combining diegesis with mimesis is not without consequences in both art and media practice. Unavoidably the message of the image-based text is associated with the sensuality, sensibility and phenomenology of a particular individual. So much so that we can rightly consider that the work is imbued with a signature of a particular practitioner and not of some anonymous 'objective' scholar. Here we note that objectivity is not celebrated or enshrined in the media arts and scholarship in a way it is in conventional scholarship.²⁵ On the contrary, most works of art have value because of the signifiers of subjectivity that come with them. We identify a work of art with a particular individual at a particular time and with a particular context. Every aspect of this subjectivity seems important to the work and commentators will often excavate the most minute details of its context as a way of explaining its meaning. For this reason the methodology of image-based scholarship is somewhat different from the methodology of conventional academia, which generally attempts to exclude the observer from the observation.²⁶

PRACTICE BASED METHODOLOGY – CONSTRUCTIVIST: An image-based text is very rarely created by a single author. Invariably many authors are implicated in the process. The resulting narrative must combine codes from all these authors in what is a most complex time-based process. An element of this complexity is suggested by the intersecting network scheme below:



There is nothing linear about this type of communication, as many codes are simultaneously used to construct the message. A complex communication network of this kind operates as an orchestra of codes that simultaneously communicate with

parallel scores and parallel logic. It also gives rise to seemingly life-like narratives and a most powerful signifying system. A glimpse of a face in a close-up may convey an enormous amount of information – enough to inspire a book of words. This is not to suggest that linear articulation is abandoned altogether in the construction of the text. On the contrary, most productions retain an elegant linearity in the storyline. The aims of the characters or the narration are generally crystal clear. But we are not only thinking logically when we watch a production. Rather we experience it with a life-like phenomenology which, in many respects, is as efficient and multi-dimensional as life itself.²⁷

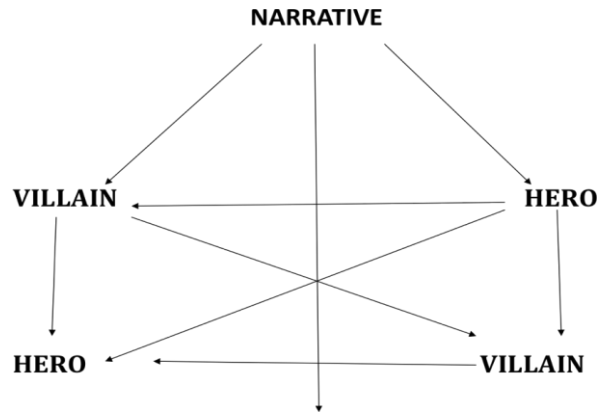
DIEGETIC LIFE FORM: There is a moment of compelling “magic” when this orchestra of codes is finally activated. Every editor is familiar with the moment when this magic comes into existence; suddenly everything seems to fall into place and the mimetic filmic diegesis comes alive. At that moment we no longer feel that we are watching a collection of fragmented performances or beholding a narrative. Instead a virtual world unfolds before us that seems in every way life-like. In this virtual world the distinction of diegesis and mimesis may be altogether dissolved, sufficiently so for us to feel that we are beholding a diegetic form of life.

ECONOMY OF EVIDENCE: The magic on the screen is not achieved only by smoke and mirrors, as is often stated in the popular media, but it entails a whole economy of supporting codes. The believability of the production comes into place when all codes implicated in the process support one another and are consistent with the diegetic world that has been created. This support includes internal coherences of many diegetic life-forms colliding with one another: princesses with frogs, hobbits with rings, heroes with villains. Often this complex coalescing of codes will not take place until the fine-cut stage of the post-production process is completed. We should not underestimate the delicate nature of this process. Even a small error in the content or the timing can puncture the diegetic life form created by the production. This is why the “fine-cut” is generally a most time-consuming stage of the production process, although the editing changes may be miniscule.

IMPACT AND CATHARSIS: The message of an image-based text is supported not only by the economy of its constituent codes but the text must also work on an emotional and ethical level. These are not “objective” qualities but this does not mean that they are unimportant to the logic of the diegesis. The emotional qualities are frequently what we take away from a production and cinematic emotion provides us with a signpost for future interrogation of the text. A sentimental response today may well be negated in future reflections.

VERIFICATION: A production can be considered as an empirical experiment. The verification process for such an experiment is not the same as one finds in social sciences but shares many of its features. Production itself may not be considered as falsifiable but it often works with falsifiable options. For example, a production will frequently commence with a most unlikable character implicated in action that we may find detestable (say a “villain”), only to discover ourselves at the end of the screening sympathising with the person in question and understanding their action (as “heroic”). The understanding is based on the near categorical principle that if these facts were repeated time and time again we would still understand the logic behind the narrative outcome. The transformation of this character is often supported by

another screen character who performs the inverse transformation from hero to villain. A scheme with such parallel and complementary narratives is given below. On the left we have the villain becoming the hero and on the right we have the hero becoming the villain. All other lines interrogate the relationship between the hero and the villain as the narrative unfolds over time:



SELF REFLEXIVITY: Screen productions generally have a whole range of symmetrical and complementary characters that interrogate one another and this interrogation, in turn, brings deeper rigour to the statements that are being made. Such an intertwined and self-reflexive mimetic-diegesis may be made up of recursive logical sets and self-referencing parallel loops that resonate with one another and with other external texts.²⁸ It may be possible to argue that diegetic life forms of this kind come to us with a very strong verification status often summarised with the well-worn adage: “Seeing is believing”.

SOCIAL SCIENCE: We should note in passing that social sciences have their own verification problems. They certainly are not value free even if they aspire to be. It is also generally accepted that each theory creates its own observables and that through its proponents a theory tends to exclude other theories that do not support it.²⁹ In addition, all theories rest on some undecidable propositions which for the purpose of this exposition could be described as fictional and perhaps visual.³⁰ The corollary is also valid: fictional productions are not without material effects. Creative works can have profound material consequences if they illuminate our existence. This is self-evident in a world that relies so much on media communication. Appearances matter. Perceptions matter. Our politicians know this all too well. They generally use media messages as a force at a distance.

DOMAIN: It may be counterproductive to look for a direct parallel between two types of scholarships. It may be more appropriate to think of each scholarship type as having its own domain of validity. We often say to production students: “Think visually.” This is another way of invoking the domain of the visual and phenomenological. Conventional scholarship does not work so well in the visual domain. No matter what we say about Mona Lisa, words will not deliver Mona Lisa. Likewise, image-based scholarship can present us with most believable texts of action but may not be all that useful when dealing with certain forms of abstract mathematics.

NECESSARY COMPLEXITY: For all the above reasons we have much to gain by systematically describing the complexities that make up image-based scholarship. Only image-based scholarship can adequately describe a world dominated by images. Reverting to conventional scholarship in these circumstances would be counter-productive, as conventional scholarship cannot account for all the features of a world in which images are ubiquitous. In time even institutions like the ARC and the DIISR will come to agree with us. Hopefully, this assessment project will facilitate this process.

I will now briefly summarize the assessment considerations that have been invoked by this presentation.

ASSESSMENT SUMMARY: Assessing image-based text requires three interdependent strategies:

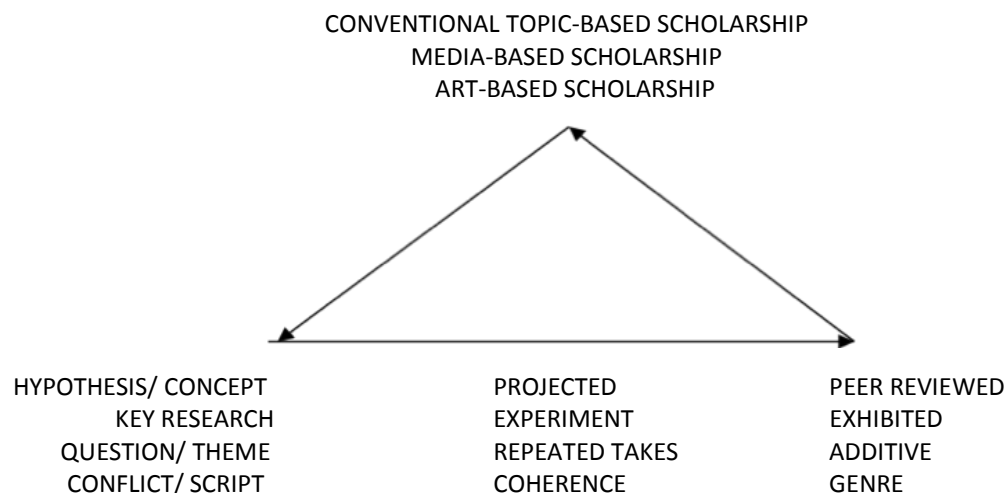
- (1) **Diegesis:** Assessing the conventional scholarship elements of the image-based text.
- (2) **Mimeses:** Assessing mimetic and practice-based qualities of the image-based text.
- (3) **Digesis + Mimeses:** Assessing how (1) and (2) inform and engage one another.

Additional details of these are given below.

(1) **ASSESSING DIEGESIS:** We can discern not one but at least three types of conventional scholarships that are relevant to the assessment of an image-based text:

- topic-based conventional scholarship
- media-based scholarship based on screen studies
- art-based scholarship associated with the study of art.

Each one of these repeats the conventional (triangular) scholarship scheme outlined earlier. It is possible to argue that conventional scholarship in screen production has three interrelated disciplines:



ASSESSING TOPIC-BASED SCHOLARSHIP: Screen producers engage with a variety of topics. This is the “What” of the screen diegesis. To be successful the treatment of these topics needs to be at the cutting edge of scholarship. Producers will spend an enormous amount of time and effort getting the world’s best experts to contribute to their productions. In doing this there is always the risk that the topic in question becomes the centerpiece of the production, in which case it no longer has the profile of screen production but of the discipline under consideration, such as history, medicine, education, etc.

ASSESSING MEDIA-BASED SCHOLARSHIP: This is the “How” of conventional screen diegesis. Accordingly, elements of screen production and screen studies would fit well within this media-specific paradigm of scholarship. The films of Godard often invoke this type of media self-reflectivity.

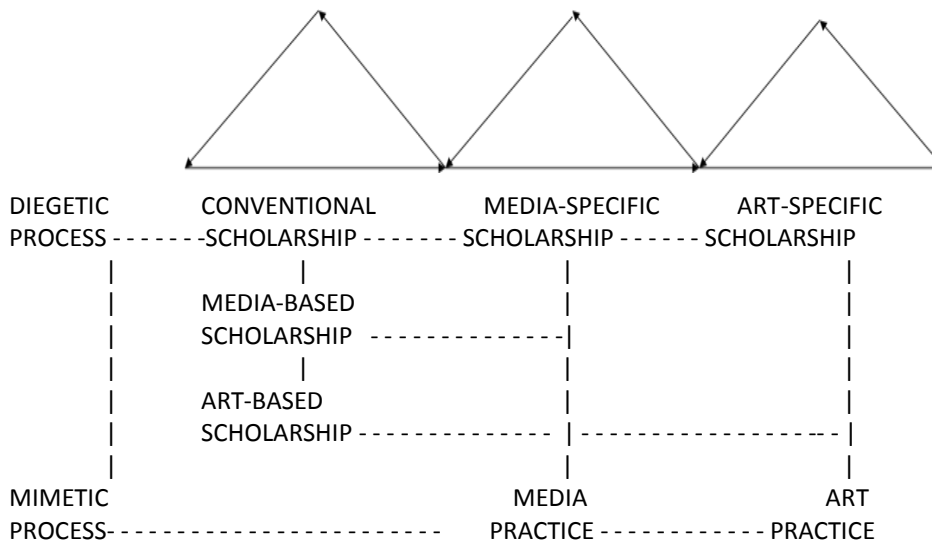
ASSESSING ART-BASED SCHOLARSHIP: This is another “How” of screen diegesis associated with the study of art. The artistic “How” is generally subservient to the “What” of the filmic diegesis but this relationship is not so straightforward. The opposite may be the case: art may well give force and direction to all diegetic and academic undertakings as I have argued earlier.

SCHOLARSHIP STANDARDS: These three modes of conventional scholarship potentially provide us with criteria and standards for undergraduate, Honours and Postgraduate levels. Specifically the standard and the quality of scholarship should determine the academic level of the production as indicated below:

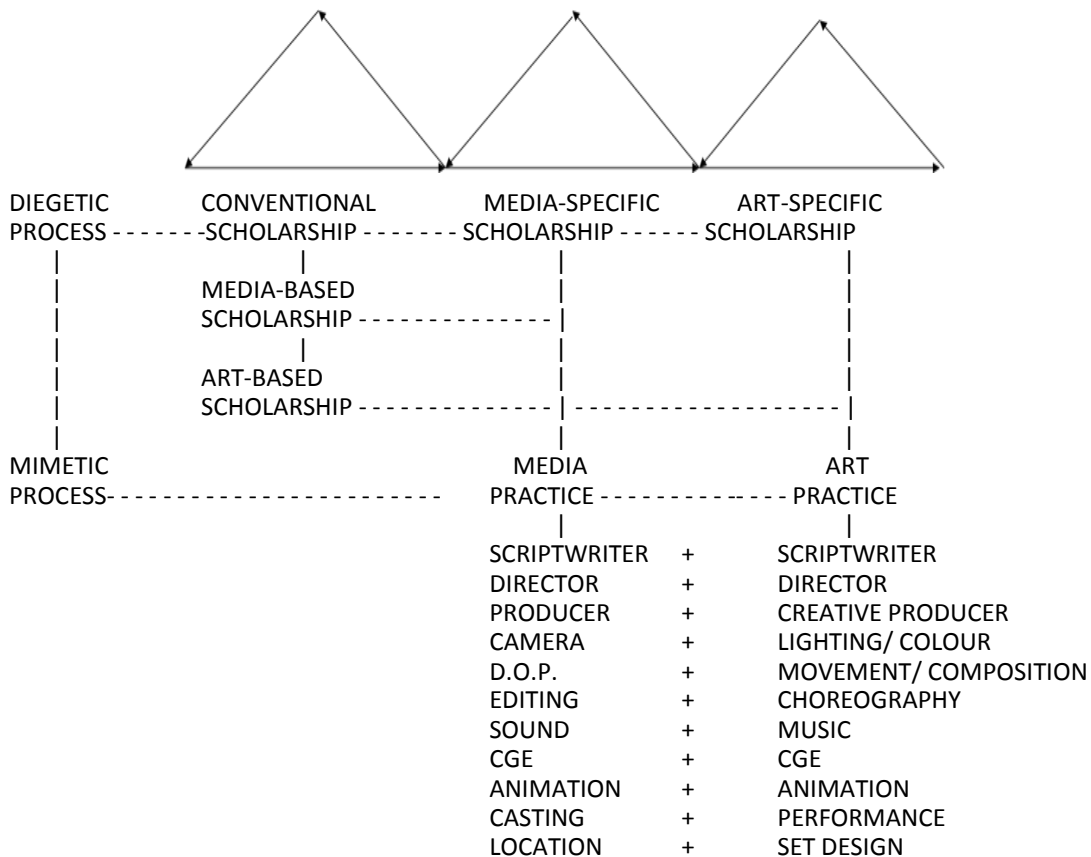
| RESEARCH TYPE | CONVENTIONAL SCHOLARSHIP | MEDIA-BASED SCHOLARSHIP | ART-BASED SCHOLARSHIP |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| POSTGRADUATE Research level | HIGH | HIGH | HIGH |
| HONOURS Research level | MODERATE | MODERATE | MODERATE |
| UNDERGRADUATE Research level | LOW | LOW | LOW |

(2) **ASSESSING MIMESIS:** Screen productions are not created by conventional scholarship alone even if this conventional scholarship is media-based or art-based. Specifying that an appropriate song will play in the background or that performance will be of a certain kind or that dance will fit the action will not deliver the said song, performance or dance. The assessment process must account for practice-based elements of the production as well as the sensibility of the practitioner who gives rise to the work in question. These mimetic “aesthetic”, subjective and phenomenological elements of media and art practice have an existence outside the conventional scholarship domain, although they are informed by conventional scholarship. It could be said that media and art practices which are informed by conventional scholarship

give rise to media-specific and art-specific scholarships as depicted in the scheme below:

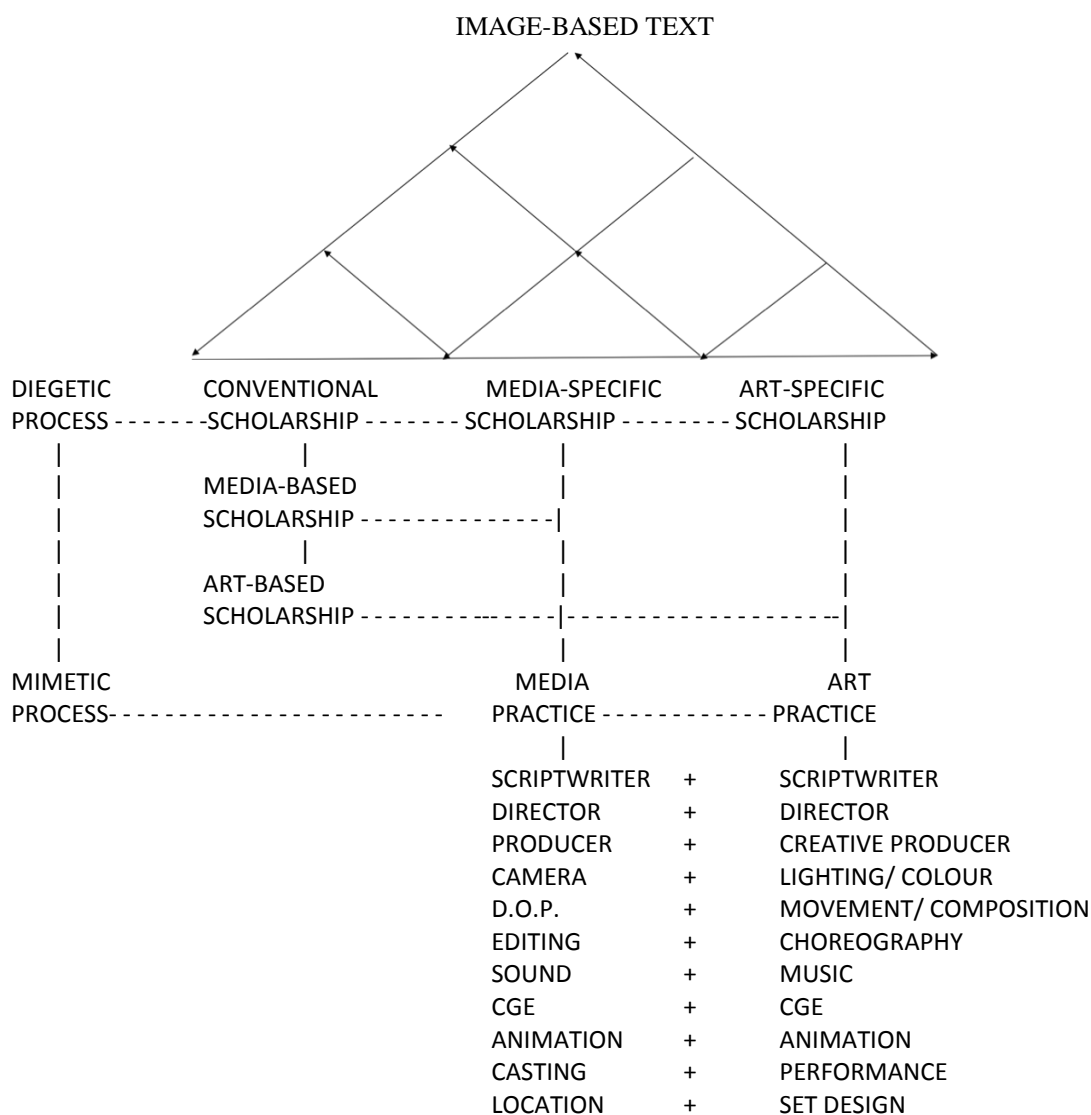


INDIVIDUAL SCORE: In the assessment process it may be necessary to identify an individual contribution from the total production orchestra. For example, the student under assessment may be a director only. This is in essence what happens when productions are given awards in festivals. The list of awards usually correlates with crew-based evaluations. We need to keep in mind that each crew contribution is informed by both theory and practice, and by both media and art considerations. The new assessment scheme is depicted below:



(3) ASSESSING DIGESIS + MIMESIS GESTALT: It should be self-evident that all the above three scholarship modes are not autonomous but are interdependent and necessarily so. The knowledge of media and art is useful in a production only if this knowledge can be integrated with the aims of the project and if it can contribute to what the project is attempting to say.

In the production process all three modes of scholarship and all the media and art practices dovetail together as depicted schematically in the diagram below:



The assessment process needs to account for the various gestalt features of the text. These should include holistic categories such as believability, direction, style, impact, social relevance and performances, to name a few.

All of these characteristic of the image-based text need to be accounted for in the final assessment sheet that will be used to test the 30 national and international assessors.

This is the essential core of my talk today although there are many other issues that we still need to consider. A number of these are summarized below:

THE BODY OF WORK: An image-based text is intimately associated with the phenomenology of the artist that has created the work. This personal phenomenology is a common factor not only for the work in question but for all previous works of the artist. In this context the work under consideration never exists in isolation but arises from a series of texts which arguably are all based on a single personal meta-text. Indeed, it is frequently said that filmmakers always work on a single piece of work no matter what film they are making. This personal dimension of filmmaking can have a major ramification in the way we assess image-based texts, as it would be inappropriate to read any particular piece of work in isolation and without noting how it relates to the body of work that gave rise to it. Although this is not likely to be a major issue with young filmmakers working at Honours level it is also not something that should be easily dismissed. One element of the Honours submission should involve describing the body of work which gave rise to the work that is being assessed.

EXEGESIS: Not all screen production works speak for themselves. Some are a product of a specific time and context. Some works operate on the absence of information rather than presence. With such production some contextual writing is essential. When such writing is present we need to consider how the combination of image-based text and writing work together.

DURATION: We need to account for the duration of the project in any assessment process. These are likely to be different according to the different program and genre. The length will also have a bearing on the length of the contextual writing when such writing is essential.

CREW FUNCTION(S): We need to be specific regarding the crew function that is being assessed. How does one compare an editor of a production with an image-maker who does everything?

MIXED CREW: The issue of mixed crew is yet another matter that needs to be considered in any assessment process. A student may work with a professional crew or with a student crew. How does one compare the two? What effect is there when the project is supervised and guided by a staff member as a Chief Investigator or an Executive Producer?

THE INDUSTRY: These days, the best screen productions also introduce something that is original in the medium itself. *Terminator*, the *Matrix* trilogy, and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy are recent examples of such medium-related advances. These also bring some troubling reflections for us and our students as well, namely: is it possible for academics to compete with multi-million dollar productions which deliver such advances? Academia should be on the cutting edge, so the answer one wants to give is yes, even if it is not easy to imagine how this could be done within our institutions. A collaboration between industry and academia is probably the only way this can be done in the foreseeable future. One can imagine Honours students and Postgraduates working on such industry-based productions. But even if such industry links could be formed it is important to note that these could be of two types: (i) simple IT collaboration, (ii) conventional screen production collaboration, which involves

collaboration in artistic and creative activities as well as IT. Arguably, only the second type of collaboration will truly advance our sector.

PEER ASSESSMENT: Are there any conditions we need to impose on the assessing panel? Do we expect them to be competent in everything? Do we want a mixture of staff capability (i.e. editor, cameraperson, director)? Do we seek gender balance? Should we always invite professionals on the assessment panel? Artists?

RELATIVITIES: How do we compare image-based outputs with conventional outputs? How do we compare an image-based text with a journal article? A book chapter? A book?³¹

STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES: Whatever answers we have for the above questions we still need to work out if it is possible to establish appropriate assessment standards and procedures. Specifically, first, is it possible to establish national and international guidelines for assessing screen productions? And, further, can all these rules and guidelines be elegantly framed within a simple assessment sheet?

This is an appropriate moment to conclude my presentation. It may also be an appropriate moment to complement the ALTC for supporting this project. When the history of creative arts in Australian universities comes to be written for this period of time, the authors will no doubt have much to say about the Australian Teaching and Learning Council (ALTC) and the support they have given to the creative arts sector as a whole. Three ALTC funded projects are represented by this Media Arts Congress.

Notes and References

1. This is a somewhat fuller version of the original conference PP presentation. The conference *Diegetic Life Forms and Diegetic Logic*, took place on 6 July 2009 at VCA, Melbourne. Full details of the conference as well as the ALTC project can be found at: <http://olt2009.murdoch.edu.au>
2. Dialectic in this context is used as a logical form that overcomes dualism – oppositions are inter-related and do not exclude one another. See Engels, F., *Dialectics of Nature (7th ed., 1973)*, (translator, Clements Dutt). New York: International Publishers. (Original work published 1940. For an opposing view on dialectic see Popper, K., *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. (2 Vols). Routledge, London, 1945.
3. For ARC details see <http://www.arc.gov.au/> (accessed September 2009)
4. The publications statistics are collected annually by each institution. DEST was replaced by DEEWR (The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) and then by DIISR (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research)
5. For further RQF details see <http://www.nteu.org.au/policy/current/other/rqf> (accessed September 2009)
6. For additional details see the following site (accessed September 2009):

<http://www.nteu.org.au/policy/current/other/rqf/preferredmodel/discussionpaper>

7. For details of ERA see: www.arc.gov.au/pdf/ERA_ConsultationPaper.pdf
For details of DEERW site see www.deewr.gov.au (accessed September 2009)
For full details of DIISR see the following site (accessed September 2009):
<http://www.innovation.gov.au/Section/AboutDIISR/Pages/default.aspx>
8. For details of ERA see: www.arc.gov.au/pdf/ERA_ConsultationPaper.pdf
9. Early contribution to his debate can be found at Powles, J., (2005) "Measures of quality and impact of publicly funded research in the humanities, arts and social sciences", CHASS, Occasional Paper 2, 1 November 2005.
10. The relationship between the creative works and an exegesis has been a topic of discussion across a range of creative arts. Some of these discussion are relevant to the relationship between image-text and its written component, including:
Perry, Gailine (1998) Writing in the Dark: Exorcising the exegesis, *TEXT* Vol. 2(2), Available from: <http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/oct00/perry.htm>
Brady, Tess (2004) A Question of Genre: de-mystifying the exegesis, *TEXT* Vol 4(1), April. Available from <http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/april00/brady.htm>
Krauth, Neigel (2002) Exegesis as Preface, *TEXT* Vol. 6 (1) Available from: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april02/krauth.htm>, Fletcher, Julia & Mann, Allan eds (2004) Illuminating the Exegesis in *TEXT* Special Issue No 3. Available at: <http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/speciss/issue3/fletchermann.htm>

The need for a written component is also applicable to the genre of image-making that works on the absence of information rather than its presence. Such "minimal" works can be explained only by an appropriate written context.
11. For an outline of this problem as well as some solutions see Peters, J. J., (aka J. Petkovic) "Image Thesis: Art or Multi-dimensional Logic" *IM* e-journal, Issue 1, May 2005, http://imjournal.murdoch.edu.au/?media_dl=454
12. The good example of conventional scholarship can be found in Popper, K., *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. (translation of *Logik der Forschung*). Hutchinson, London, 1959. Also, Popper, K., *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. Routledge, London, 1963. The best example of diegetic cosmology can be found in Russell, B., Whitehead, Alfred North (1910/13) *Principia Mathematica*, UK, Cambridge University Press.
13. See Karl Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, *ibid*.
14. Mimesis is used here as used by Plato in *The Republic* (Books II, III and X) – as an imitation or representation of things in nature. Translated by Benjamin Jowett edition is available on the following website: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>
15. For more details of this early version of semiotics see Kristeva, J., *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1980.
16. Lacan gives a version of this transition with his three orders of the subject, namely the order of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic. See Lacan, J., *Ecrites*, transl. Alan Sheridan, Tavisotck, 1966/ 1977.

- 17 Antonin Artaud is a particular good example of this Dadaist tendency. See Artaud, A., *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1958. Also, Artaud, A., *50 Drawings to Murder Magic*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Seagull Books, 2008. Also, Artaud, A., *Artaud Anthology*, trans. Jack Hirschman. San Francisco: City Lights, 1963.
- 18 In Greek mythology Apollo and Dionysus are both sons of Zeus.
- 19 Newton's *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* exemplified the analytical method that would dominate science following its publication in 1687.
- 20 For a good description of the recent relationship between the written and image-based epistemology see Jay M., *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Centennial Book, 1993. The tension between the two is reworked in a somewhat positive fashion by Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts*, Princeton University Press, 1995.
- 21 Nietzsche, F., *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Douglas Smith, Oxford University Press, 2000.
- 22 Many post-modern works embrace the entanglement of art and scholarship of this kind. The writing of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari are particular good example, an especially two volumes of Capitalism and Schizophrenia, namely: *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Vol.1), trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, London, Althone Press, 1984 and *Thousand Plateau: Capitalism an Schizophrenia* (Vol. 2), trans. Massumi, University of Minneapolis Press, 1987.
- 23 For Foucault the discourse of science and discourse of social science are still discourses that came into existence and are not found naturally. He show this for social science in *The Order of Things*, London, Tavistock, 1970. In this book he also alludes to the possibility that a similar description could be undertaken for the so called hard sciences. Writing by Paul Feyerabend argues for a similar stance from a somewhat different perspective. See Feyerabend P. K., *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*, Humanities Press, London, UK, 1975. Reprinted, Verso, London, UK, 1978.
- 24 Walker, P., *Tokyo Rose*, Honours Dissertation, Murdoch University, 2007 (unp.)
- 25 See defense of the scientific method and objectivity see Sceski, J. H., *Popper, Objectivity and the Growth of Knowledge*, Continuum, 2007
- 26 The Copenhagen interpretation of Quantum Mechanics by Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg is an enlightened exception to this exclusion of the observer. This is the dominant perspective of Quantum Mechanics, The Heisenberg's uncertainty principle prescribes what this interdependent relationship is in concrete terms.
- 27 It may well be that the power of the image reflects the power of our neural connections that in the end are recorded by all our perceptual apparatus and of the body in particular. Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* offers a perspective on how this position can be developed further. It may also be useful to revisit the "non-arbitrary" semiotic system developed by C. S. Peirce which includes such visual items as "index" and "icon" and is often contrasted with the arbitrary system of signification developed by Ferdinand Saussure. For details see Peirce, C. S., *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic*, James Hoopes (ed.), University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 1994.

- 28 This logical scheme bears some resemblance to the Aristotle's Square although one could argue that what is being presented is much more complicated and hypertext and writely text are probably better terms. Useful references for additional reading on this include: Ilana Snyder, I., *Hypertext*, Melbourne University Press, 1996.
Petkovic, J. The Rhizome and the Image, PhD thesis, Murdoch University, 1997.
Hansen, M., *Embodying Technesis: Technology beyond Writing*, Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 2000.
- 29 The doctrinal nature of sciences has been accepted for a while. See Kuhn, T. S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, and Chicago, IL, 3rd edition 1996. Also, Feyerabend, Paul K., *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*, Humanities Press, London, UK, 1975. Reprinted, Verso, London, UK, 1978.
- 30 The optimism of science evaporated as far back as 1931 following Kurt Gödel's publication *On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematics and Related Systems*, New York Basic Books, 1931/62.
- 31 ASPERA already has such a measure. See Marvell, Leon (2005), Screen Production Studies and ASPRI, *IM: Interactive Media*, Issue 1,
Available from: http://imjournal.murdoch.edu.au/?media_dl=453