

Screen Production Studies and ASPRI: The Australian Screen Production Research Index

Leon Marvell

At the recent 2nd annual national ASPERA Conference (June 2005, University of Technology Sydney) a general consensus was reached as to the necessity of resolving upon an index for the evaluation of screen-based research contributions.

The Australian Screen Production Research Association was formed to provide a platform and voice for those tertiary institutions which provide production courses in screen studies within Australia. While screen production courses have been constantly in high demand by both undergraduate and postgraduate students for at least the past twenty years or so, the academies wherein such courses are offered have often struggled to recognise the scholarly merit of the screen-works of both staff and students.

A brief window in the early 1990s allowed scholars involved in the creative arts to apply for RAI points for their creative research, but this window was quickly and abruptly closed when it became clear to those involved in the assessment of creative research that the task was for the most part beyond them. Much of this can be attributed to the fact that non-text based research appeared oxymoronic to assessors who were far from comfortable with anything other than peer-reviewed articles and papers.

In short the failure of this brief effort to recognise screen-based and other forms of creative research as legitimate scholarly contributions was attributable to the dearth of suitably qualified assessors among those charged with the task of scholarly review, and the lack of a suitable set of guidelines by which creative research works could be assessed.

To redress this continuing lack of academic recognition of screen-based research, the 2005 ASPERA conference has proposed the adoption of a set of guidelines that may contribute to a future reassessment of the value of creative research outcomes.

The following items were proposed, discussed, amended and unanimously approved by ASPERA members. Together these proposals form the essential guidelines for the formation of a National Peer Review Committee and the implementation of the ASPRI: the Australian Screen Production Research Index.

[1] The Australian Screen Production Research and Education Association (ASPERA) will appoint a National Peer Review Committee to oversee the evaluation of screen-based creative/professional works.

[2] The National Peer Review Committee will be made up of representatives from each state.

[3] Each state representative will be responsible for convening a properly accredited state branch of the ASPERA Peer Review Committee to evaluate creative works submitted to it.

[4] The national Peer Review Committee will moderate the work of state branches to ensure that evaluation is uniform throughout Australia.

[5] ASPERA will advise DEST and other relevant authorities on the publication value of screen-based works submitted to it.

[6] An image-based production will be considered to be refereed if it is endorsed as a refereed publication by a properly established ASPERA Peer Review Committee made up of at least three peers of Lecturer B level (or above).

[7] In assessing the publication value of creative works submitted to it, ASPERA Peer Review Committee may consider a range of evidence, including:

[i] Written reviews and submission by academic peers.

Exhibiting at conferences and festivals provides another source of peer assessment. The production value is generally proportional to the importance of the conference and festival in question, namely if it is local, regional, national or international.

[ii] A screen-based production will also be considered to be refereed:

- If it is shown at national or international conferences.
- If it is shown at a properly accredited national or international festival.
- If it receives theatrical distribution.
- If it is shown on national free-to-air or cable television in Australia or overseas.

If it has been produced or financed by the Australian Film Commission (AFC), Film Finance Corporation (FFC), state film funding bodies or equivalent institutions.

[iii] A script or a documentary treatment will be considered refereed if it has been through an appropriate peer assessment procedure which could be the ASPERA Peer Review Committee or an industry body such as the AFC, ABC, SBS, ScreenWest etc.

The ASPERA Peer Review Committee will use the following Australian Screen Production Research Index (ASPRI) to evaluate the academic research value of screen-based works:

[1] The Australian Screen Production Research Index (ASPRI) will be based on the present (text-based) index of a fully authored book being equal to 5 points.

[2] The baseline for ASPRI evaluation will be a one-hour documentary production (having a duration of 52-60 minutes).

[3] A one-hour documentary will have the following “authors” and ASPRI points:

Creative Producer	2 points
Researcher	2 points
Writer	2 points
Director	2 points
Cinematographer	2 points
Editor	2 points
Special Effects	(up to) 2 points

[4] Productions that are longer in duration will have the same index as a one-hour documentary.

[5] The index for shorter productions will be proportional to their duration (and based on the one-hour documentary points).

[6] An exhibition of a student’s significant work will be considered a legitimate publication. Generally speaking, supervisors will be considered as creative producers or executive producers and will correspondingly attract publication value. For example:

National Festival 0.5 ASPRI points for each 10 min. short film

Local Festival 0.25 ASPRI points for each 10 min. short film

[7] Award Nominations by the Australian Film Institute provides an appropriate high-end benchmark for production quality in Australia.

[8] Major competitive national and international festivals also provide an appropriate high-end benchmark for production quality.

[9] For a production to be considered as that of a single author (sole authorship) the author must be the primary project researcher, writer and director of the screen-work.

[10] Sole authorship, or multiple production roles, can only attain a maximum of 5 credit points.

While the above proposals may not resolve all the problems presently encountered by academic screen researchers in the Australian context, it was agreed by all ASPERA participants that the two principal initiatives—the formation of a National Peer Review Committee composed of members of ASPERA (wherein considerable screen-based academic and production experience can be found and utilised), and the adoption of the Australian Screen Production Research Index—would immediately serve to revitalise the discussion of the scholarly contribution of academic screen researchers within the humanities.