

IM Issue 1, 2005 Editorial

Inaugural Issue

What is an appropriate editorial statement?

When we came to consider this question, there were many worthy proclamations which offered themselves to us. For example, it is customary in this genre of writing for editors to project an incisive theoretical challenge and to present a philosophical perspective which in time one could look back upon and hopefully confirm as having established an important space for IM. We also had an opportunity to make much on the wondrous attributes of interactivity and muse on the interactive form of life that, in time, we wish to establish with our readers through this e-journal. In a similar vein, many other interesting perspectives related to the practice of image making came into focus. But in the end when we came to consider what really needed to be said to our readers at this point of time, we quickly concluded that this message was indeed simple, as well as obvious, and one which runs along the following lines:

- We live in a world that is ever more reliant on images. Images mediate most of our transactions and communications and most objects we buy or sell. Image-based industries are already among the world's most capital intensive industries.
- The social, cultural and economic importance of these creative industries is and will remain profound – image-based creative industries are proclaimed to be the next major source of employment growth.
- As these creative industries continue to grow, each nation will become a net importer or exporter of creative industries products, depending on how each nation directs itself to the task of training, researching and producing of screen-based products.

The economic potential of these new media products and the competition that this potential inspires has created an industry that requires an ever-higher level of knowledge, research, conceptual and technological sophistication. The audiovisual industry that once required a mere undergraduate “craft” has now become a most contested area of research and development, manifested in ever-more spectacular concepts and CGI effects that we now see in almost every feature film. To train industry professionals in this area can no longer be merely provided by an undergraduate tertiary programme alone.

Contact Us

IM takes it as self-evident that to participate in the global-image making industry is as demanding and complicated as is rocket science. We also take it as self-evident that to train a successful screen industry



professional requires continuous training to postgraduate research and then to post-doctoral practice. In days ahead, we expect that the best and most innovative practitioners will be found in the postgraduate and post-doctoral sections of academia – as is the case with other complex industries.

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For all these reasons we consider that screen production research is arguably one of the most innovative, relevant and influential research methodology available to researchers in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences sector today. We note that this area of academia is flourishing at the undergraduate level and has been doing so for some time.

In these circumstances one would also expect to find a flourishing screen production research culture at tertiary institutions. Surprisingly this is generally not so. For all its potential and its influence, the methodology of screen production research is not well understood by conventional academia. For all its importance and potential, this most productive sector of academia seems quarantined by institutional silence.

This can be explained mostly by the fact that, historically, screen production has been categorized as “art” and image texts as “art” were generally excluded from, or found few opportunities for academic publication and research categories.

Australia provides a good case in point. It is only with the inclusion of creative arts within the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) research categories in 2001 that screen production itself became a legitimate research activity. One should quickly add that the DEST publications category for creative works, also introduced in 2001, was short lived and lasted only a year. Furthermore, the Australian Research Council (ARC) still principally declines to fund anything which involves producing “art” even when it is research based. They leave this to the Australian Council for the Arts. The Australian Council for the Arts in turn generally declines to fund anything that has to do with research at tertiary institutions as do, increasingly, the AFC and state film agencies.

The combined effect of this long term exclusion by ARC, DEST, Ozco and the government film agencies has been devastating and could be summarised, historically as follows:

- Few, if any, postgraduate and/or research programmes in screen production
- No refereed journals in screen production
- No research centres in screen production
- Few research grants applications in screen production
- Low number of screen producers with research and PhD qualifications

On a wider scale:

- No R&D infrastructure for the screen industry
- Low and decreasing local industry output
- Lack of production opportunities and a lack of production funds
- Loss of local screen culture and cultural heritage in general

IM anticipates that, in time and with a well-funded research regime, it will be possible for tertiary institutions to

contribute robustly to the screen production industry and culture in a way that has not been possible until now. IM anticipates that tertiary institutions will be able to achieve this in screen production as they have been doing quite successfully in other complex industries for a long time now.

IM is most optimistic that this research agenda will succeed and we note that a range of tertiary institutions are already embracing an ever-increasing number of postgraduate students who wish to engage with screen production, not primarily as art but as research.

Helping to redress this situation is the overriding “interactive” agenda of this journal.

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FROM THE HOME OF IM: THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCREEN AND SOUND (NASS)

The National Academy of Screen and Sound (NASS) and the present home of the IM e-journal provides an excellent example of the problems foregrounded by the editors of IM above. The Academy was originally formed as a research centre to facilitate the flourishing research community of screen producers and researchers at Murdoch University, Western Australia. While this research centre has an overflowing energy, its best and brightest producers and researchers are presently being turned away by the existing funding bodies for reasons outlined already, namely: they are considered to be doing either an inappropriate art-and-not-research by some and an inappropriate research-and-not-art by others.

Funding the emerging screen production research at tertiary level will require a major change in the culture of our funding organizations which will take place only under a clear policy directive from both federal and state governments. It will require establishing new links and partnerships between individual researchers, their respective research institutions, state and federal governments, government instrumentalities as well as industry at large.

To facilitate this development in Australia we should take a cue from the June 2004 recommendations of the House of Representative Standing Committee on Communication, Information and the Arts Report: “From Reel to Unreal: Future opportunities for Australia’s film, animation, special effects and electronic games industries”. Further to the argument presented by the IM editors I would offer the following variations, additions and modification to the recommendations presented in this report and would respectfully suggest that without these changes the original recommendations will be ineffective:

Recommendation 1

The National Academy of Screen and Sound (NASS) urges the Australian Government, in cooperation with the peak body of all Australian film schools, the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA), to articulate its commitment to screen production research through a policy statement. Specifically we seek that such a policy statement develops a coherent and integrated funding regime for all levels of screen production research at tertiary institutions as is the case with most other research based industries.

Recommendation 2

NASS urges the Australian Government to establish a national advisory group through ASPERA and provide this advisory group with funding and in-kind support for a period of 5 years.

This advisory group should be directed to do the following:

(a) audit the infrastructure research needs of the ASPERA sector which currently consist of at least 18 universities.

(b) establish relevant national priorities for screen production research.

(d) develop an ongoing strategy to ensure that the ASPERA sector remains 'state-of-the-art' and capable of delivering the world class research and education.

(e) ensure that the entire ASPERA sector has the expertise to evaluate new software and other technologies and is sufficiently resourced for this task.

(f) establish a software affordability fund for all ASPERA research institutions.

(g) develop an intellectual property strategy for the ASPERA sector which will address the roles of capital, content, and distribution.

(h) facilitate and resource international research linkage through research co-productions, research scholarships, seminars, conferences, festivals and forums.

(i) promote greater links between the ASPERA research sector and the industry.

(j) ensure maximum utilisation of intellectual property produced by the ASPERA research sector.

Recommendation 3

NASS urges the Australian Government, in cooperation with ASPERA, to work with national and state regulatory bodies and most critically with its own Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the Australian Research Council (ARC) to ensure that these bodies regulate for a proper recognition of image-based research within academia for the purposes of publication, research quantum and national research priorities. Such regulations must properly reflect the social, cultural and economic importance of image-based research.

Recommendation 4

NASS urges the Australian Government, in cooperation with ASPERA, to designate all film schools in Australian universities, public or private, as national key creative industry centres, in recognition of and as a means to rectifying the long-term damage caused by the existing, exclusionary policies of the Australian Research Council and the federally administered arts and film funding agencies.

In addition NASS asks that the Australian Government, in cooperation with state and territory governments and ASPERA, designate these creative industries centres as digital media incubators to harness the opportunities in a convergent market for joint training, research and product development.

Recommendation 5

NASS urges the Australian Government, in cooperation with ASPERA, to review the membership of the Australian Research Council and the federally administered arts and film funding agencies to ensure that such institutions better represent the image based world we live in and t the research nature of creative arts practice.

Recommendation 6

NASS urges the Australian Government, as part of the intellectual property strategy, to encourage the Australian Research Council and federally administered arts and film funding agencies to invest more resources into identifying innovative screen production research projects and scripts (in terms of their quality and commercial potential) by providing them additional support.

Recommendation 7

NASS urges the Australian Government, in cooperation with ASPERA, to establish special postgraduate scholarships and postdoctoral schemes in recognition of the particular needs of screen production researchers in film, TV, animation, special effects and electronic games industries. Additionally, we ask that additional mechanisms be adopted to encourage ABC, SBS, AFC, FFC and similar institutions to be actively involved in these programmes and initiatives.

Recommendation 8

NASS urges the Australian Government, in cooperation with ASPERA and state and territory governments, to undertake a major Review of all national and state screen funding instrumentalities to ensure that these agencies support the tertiary screen production research sector and remove any discriminatory funding/guidelines as a strict condition of their funding and as their main funding priority.

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