

FRN: Publishing Screen Media Practice Research: Evolving Processes of Contextualisation, Peer Review and Future Proofing in *Screenworks*

Introduction

This article explores the role of online publishing in the validation of academic filmmaking as a discipline through the discussion of *Screenworks*, the peer-reviewed journal of screen media practice research. As editors of the journal, we elaborate and reflect on the ways in which the formats, submission requirements, open peer review and editorial processes of *Screenworks* have evolved, unpacking how the journal has responded to the challenges and opportunities involved in carving out this new space for the evaluation and presentation of practice research. We suggest that with the widespread acceptance of practice research the field has come of age and hence faces a new set of challenges around the sustainability of knowledge and archival considerations for future researchers. Taking *Screenworks* as a central case-study, we argue that the impetus for practitioner-researchers is no longer just about justifying the scholarly value of their work, as this has become largely accepted alongside more traditional forms of research in a growing number of conferences, funding institutions and research assessment bodies. Whilst it remains an important function of academic publishing to provide a space to contextualize and peer review practice research, journals engaging with audiovisual content also need to develop robust archival strategies to allow future generations to access these digitally driven research outputs and extend the field. In order to show the relevance of these claims, it is important to situate *Screenworks* within its historical context, before exploring current opportunities and challenges.

Context: the formation of *Screenworks*

Screenworks emerged out of discussions at the *Journal of Media Practice* symposium on 'Peer review and dissemination of practice-led research' held at Salford, UK, in June 2006, building on the inaugural *Journal of Media Practice (JMP)* symposium on 'Articulating media practice as research' held at London South Bank University (LSBU) in 2005 (Knudsen, 2007, 5). Initiated in 2006 by documentary researcher, editor and producer Jon Dovey, then based at University of Bristol, with filmmaker and lecturer Charlotte Crofts, as associate editor, then at LSBU, *Screenworks* (or *ScreenWork* as it was originally called) grew out of an anxiety about the "researchness" (or the scholarly or academic validity) of screen media practice research which was being expressed in the run up to the UK's Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008 (an evaluation exercise to determine levels of research funding for UK HEIs). These concerns were also being explored within other subject disciplines and Units of Assessment (UoAs) such as Art and Design (see Bell, 2006) and Performance (see *PARIP/Practice as Research In Performance*), where 'questions of documentation and evaluation raise wider issues with regard, "the various epistemologies of, and knowledges generated by, practice as research"' (Piccini and Kershaw cited in Bell, 2006, 94).

In the UK, then, there was a growing incentive for academic filmmakers to seek peer review for their work in order to participate in governmental research assessment. This was partly in reaction to post-RAE 2001 reporting which, while praising an 'impressive volume and range of practice as research across the disciplines', questioned the 'very variable' quality of some of the submissions and claimed 'there is a lack of clarity for a significant number of researchers about what constitutes practice as research' (HEFCE,

2002, 2). The HEFCE report identified a need for practice research to develop its 'own versions of scholarly apparatus for self-validation ... through appropriate documentation and other discourses' (HEFCE, 2002, 2). Although the editorial team is now international and the journal regularly publishes work from different countries, it is worth noting that these initial considerations were largely the concern of academics working within UK higher education. Whilst there are other research excellence frameworks (for example ERA (Excellence in Research for Australia), these specific UK institutional research contexts were an important catalyst in the development of *Screenworks*.

Thus, the journal was developed in response to what *Screenworks*' founder Jon Dovey has described as this 'very clear "steer" that practice as research requires its own versions of scholarly apparatus for self-validation' (2007, 65). *Screenworks* originated as a DVD insert distributed by Intellect Ltd with *Journal of Media Practice* (then edited by John Adams). The DVD distribution was accompanied by a website with the supporting statements and peer reviews, plus short extracts of the videos, which was hosted at University of Bristol (where Jon Dovey was then based). Volume 1 was distributed with *JMP* 8: 2 (Autumn 2007). Volume 2 (with Dovey as Editor and Associate Editor Govinda Dickman, as Crofts was on maternity leave), was again distributed with *JMP* 9:3 (December 2008). Around the time that *Screenworks* was first published, the Association for Media Practice Educators (AMPE) merged with (or, as some members felt, was subsumed into) the Media, Communications and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA) in January 2007, which had further fuelled concerns about the status of practice as research. MeCCSA's response to this was to create the MeCCSA Practice Section (chaired by Crofts from 2007-9) and since then a strong practice

community has developed within MeCCSA, as evidenced by the strength of the practice presentations and screenings at the recent MeCCSA 2018 Conference at LSBU, largely due to the work of filmmaker-academic Joanna Callaghan, MeCCSA Practice Network chair since 2009, and currently leading the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded UK-Australian Filmmaking Research Network.

It is clear, then, that *Screenworks* emerged out of a perceived need both within and outside of the UK practice community for more visibility of the 'Significance, Originality and Rigour' of practice research, validated by a scholarly framework. Knudsen (2007, 5) acknowledges the publication of the first edition of *Screenworks* as 'an important development in the publication strategies for practice-led media research. In this sense, we are, perhaps witnessing a world's first'. *Screenworks* continues to be regarded as an important example of best practice. Adams and McDougall (2015, 102) cited JMPScreenworks.com as 'a vital initiative enabling the ready publication of peer reviewed practice research work':

There is a substantial body of work available in the volumes published to date, and it is to the great credit of the editors, researchers and reviewers that the reviews are published alongside the work – there is no substitute for models of best practice. (Adams and McDougall, 2015, 102)

And indeed *Screenworks* has become internationally recognised as an example of best practice: both *[In]Transition*, published in the USA and the Australian publication, *Sightlines* acknowledge *Screenworks* as a forerunner in terms of its influence on the development of their submission and peer review processes. *[In]Transition*, which launched March 2014, notes that *Screenworks*' 'innovative review process' has informed their own, 'we are employing an active, dialogic model of criteria generation and research within our 'community of screen media scholar practitioners as to how our

research is constituted, defined and disseminated'. And, according to Glisovic, Berkeley and Batty (2016, 16), *Sightlines* used *Screenworks* as one of their 'best-practice models for the peer review process' arguing that the 'nonprescriptive approach to evaluation criteria and an explicitly dialogic and more public approach to the peer review process' struck them as 'the most suitable for the long-term development of our research discipline at the current time'. It is for these reasons that *Screenworks* makes a particularly compelling example of the challenges currently facing the field of practice-research. In order to evaluate how *Screenworks* can inform the international practice research community, it is useful to unpick how the editorial process evolved, as we go on to do in the next section.

Submission process: articulating practice as research

Screenworks' initial editorial process was developed in response to two key concerns: whether there was a need for and what weighting any written statement might take in the submission process and how to effectively evaluate practice research in a way that equates to the peer review of scholarly articles. One of the perennial questions circulating about practice research at that time was whether the practice itself can inherently demonstrate a contribution to 'new knowledge', without recourse to a supporting narrative or research statement (see Bell, 2006; Dovey, 2007). Our project here is not to re-rehearse these arguments, but to explore how *Screenworks'* evolving editorial process has been at the forefront of the development of a new kind of academic publishing and to examine how we might learn from the journal's challenges to aid the longer-term sustainability of practice research publication.

The journal's editorial process originally grew out of a 'peer review simulation exercise' undertaken at the Salford/JMP symposium (Dovey, 2007, 68). According to Dovey, 'my primary conclusion from this experiment is that practitioners will need to be very, very careful in what they submit with their work,' warning against 'an ontology of word before image which *ScreenWork* must ... find some way to challenge if it is to find a place in the world' (Dovey, 2007, 69). Drawing on Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" in their discussion of *[In]Transition*, Glisovic, Berkeley and Batty suggest the writing could be seen as 'not being simply a "report" – which might be a reductive process – but rather as a separate work, one in which the writing and the moving image work each illuminated and expanded one another' (2016, 12). Seen in this light, the written element becomes less of a 'problem' more of an opportunity for dialogue. Another key outcome was the realisation that there was always a danger of conforming to the received structures inherited from traditional publication modes. As Crofts argued at the time, 'rather than attempt to replicate the existing scientific model that published research in the humanities is currently subject to, the practice research community has an opportunity to invent new ways in which to validate practice research within the academy' (Crofts, 2007, 20).

There was a real feeling that we were forging new ways of validating practice as research, and that came with an immense burden of responsibility. For Dovey, this was to be process of co-production through which 'criteria for research will be generated by the community over a period of time – that we will use a dialogic model of criteria generation and research' (Dovey, 2007, 68). For this reason, Dovey argued against the suggestion that a template should be provided for submissions:

since for me it cuts across the dialogic basis of the “ScreenWork” project to develop criteria through a conversation with practitioners that responds to what we actually do rather than what text-based academics think we ought to do (Dovey, 2007, 69).

Although Dovey expressed anxiety about the text-based element of the submission and its relation to the research object, a research statement was nevertheless part of the original submission process. The invited word count was originally 1,000 words. Since Crofts’ editorship (Volume 3 onwards), a template has since been adopted (originally 1,500, now 2,000 words), developed in response to editorial experience in relation to the need to create an equitable basis for evaluation. In terms of the current *Screenworks* submission process, work is submitted via a Vimeo URL (password protected if needed) and an accompanying 2000-word Research Statement – all entered on the required Submissions Proforma in the form of a Word document available on the *Screenworks* website (although the editorial board is looking at streamlining this process using an online submission form). The submission proforma is currently broken down into the following subsections:

- Research Questions
- Context
- Methods
- Outcomes
- Dissemination
- Impact
- Additional Information
- Bibliography

The contributor can indicate the criteria with which they wish the work to be evaluated, outline their ideal viewing conditions, and also ask for either ‘formative’ or ‘summative’ feedback. This form has evolved over the years, with the addition of various author agreements about copyright, exclusivity, etc., and an added section on impact in the wake of the ‘impact agenda’ in the run up to (successor to the RAE) Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 and particularly in response to the following criticism:

a number of the authored context statements and peer reviews are structured by whimsical and occasionally irrelevant criteria. This makes comparative evaluation difficult and presents a challenge to editorial standards. The editors are exploring ways to make the statement and reviews better aligned with the REF (and HEFCE) criteria. This applies equally to the development of protocols for evaluating 'impact', and further work on mini-impact statements would help develop confidence in concepts and presentation. (Adams and McDougall, 2015, 102)

Other journals in the field have taken a less prescriptive approach to the combination of text and audiovisual material in their submission process. For instance, the *Journal of Artistic Research (JAR)* which is published by the Society for Artistic Research (SAR) relies on the Research Catalogue (RC), an innovative platform which enables contributors to design and submit their work using a rich media web format. In the 2010 editorial the inaugural issue, the editor-in-chief Michael Schwab described the RC and *JAR* as 'a sophisticated repository with a design interface that allows for the upload, storage and sharing of material and for and expositional placement on the page... through them material is woven together to make a case for what is presented to count as research' (2010). This submission process intertwines the creative presentation with the research itself and hence aligns more closely to Dovey's initial suggestion that publications should respond to criteria arising within the field of practice research. The divergence is perhaps because *JAR* outlines its field of interest as 'artistic research' and hence caters to a wider range of disciplines beyond screen media. Although this is an innovative experiment, *JAR's* model invites criticism due to the lack of standardization across submissions which could potentially obfuscate their relevance during scholarly searches or research assessment exercises.

Since moving online, rather than distributing via DVD, *Screenworks* primarily embeds audiovisual content on the website through videos that remain hosted on the

contributor's Vimeo profile. This raises issues of future-proofing, sustainability and archiving, shared by many practice research publications, which we will return to later in this article.

Peer review: evaluating practice research

Publication of *Screenworks'* peer reviews was originally included in order to make the peer review process explicit – to show the evaluation of the practice as research at a time when there was still a great deal of anxiety around this in the lead up to RAE 2008 as stated above. Berkeley & Glisovic (2015) emphasise the importance of peer review, but stress the concomitant need for practice research to make the peer review process explicit:

Like text-based academic journals, we see peer review as the best way to ensure the quality of the published research. We also feel that the discipline at this stage in its development needs an approach to peer review that exposes the research evaluation process to the wider peer community.

Right from the beginning, it was decided that given the nature of the authorship and circulation of film works the contributors should not be anonymized, as their names are often indelibly emblazoned across the credits of the films submitted. Whilst the reviews are published, the peer reviewers remain anonymous - a model that has been challenged by both the Australian *Sightlines* and the American published *[In]Transition* who operate under a more open model of peer review where reviewers' names are published next to the reviews. This non-anonymity of peer reviews contributes to the experience of collaborative discourse. As *[in]Transition* peer-reviewer and contributor Shane Denson points out, 'the necessity of conceiving the task of "disciplinary validation" in terms of collective, though distributed and occasionally conflictive, authorship—video essayists, viewers, and reviewers become the collective authors of a

new type of scholarship: a prismatic, multimodal discourse for a multi-modal form' (2017, 143). The dialectic between practice and statement, inflected by peer review is the added value of publication of academic filmmaking. Contrasting this again, the *Journal of Artistic Research* adopts a more traditional model and does not publish peer-reviews but still encourages discourse through the Research Catalogue's editorial features.

Writing about the process of putting together the first DVD volume of (the then) *ScreenWork*, Dovey yearns for 'the establishment of a common ground where we could meet as viewers and users to encounter what we agreed was important work, that this work should establish a profile for itself in the world finding audiences beyond the academic circuit that initiated its production' (2007, 63). But it is also important to develop the practice research discipline beyond research assessment agenda, reaching beyond the academy. As Dovey asserts:

I am more interested in seeing a genuine creative international network of scholar practitioners who are able to develop the field through their work ... that this body of work would be understood as making a recognisable contribution to knowledge within the fields of cultural production from which it emerged – by this I mean that we should be seen by the cultural industries as playing not just a training and education role but a research role. (Dovey, 2007, 65)

Dovey argued at the time that 'online communications and publishing are changing the provenance of knowledge by widening the peer communities of interpretation' (2007, 64). Since then the increasing role of social media in the dissemination of these emerging online forms of videographic film scholarship and practice research deserves scrutiny. *Screenworks* has both Twitter and Facebook accounts and is intertwined with the MeCCSA Practice Network's Facebook page and individual editors' personal accounts. The affordances of social media have enabled an extension and amplification

of these 'peer dialogues', so that practice research is circulating in new ways and to new audiences. No longer siloed with the practice research community only talking to each other, online publication in tandem with social media, enables these 'new insights' to be 'effectively shared' across the wider academic discipline, and beyond.

A recent AHRC study on the publication process across a number of academic disciplines, conducted by Dorothy Butchard, Simon Rowberry, Claire Squires, & Gill Tasker (2016), concluded by identifying 'an urgent need to address issues with communication, consistency, efficiency and credit' amongst scholars undertaking traditional peer review models and also suggested that further interrogation was required to develop new models that might be more sustainable and fair. In many ways, the processes that we have outlined through this discussion of *Screenworks* can be seen in response to this criticism and the stagnant landscape of academic publishing.

Dovey suggests that in traditional publication 'peer reviewing has evolved as a way of making sure that weaknesses in the work are spotted and corrected before publication.

The process has the important effect of creating a community of scholarship around a subject that guarantees a reliable body of research and knowledge' (2007, 63).

Screenworks' editorial process raises questions about the possibilities for amendment and improvement of work, following peer review, which are often different from conventional editorial practices regarding written scholarship, and which although proving challenging to some practitioners (and reviewers), can also open up opportunities as indicated in the following case studies.

Opportunities: defining the field of practice research

Screenworks invites contributors to state whether they want 'formative' or 'summative' peer review – often films are finished and already circulating, therefore making it difficult for contributors to respond to peer review requiring a re-edit, but for those who are still developing their practice the opportunity for formative feedback has proved very fruitful.

In one case, the peer review process gave the contributor, filmmaker and lecturer Paola Bilbrough (Victoria University, Australia), the confidence to re-edit a work in response to positive reviews inviting resubmission with minor amendments. According to associate editor, Nariman Massoumi (University of Bristol), Bilbrough revised the research statement and re-edited the film with a different title (*They Always Asked About Africa*) and without music. Neither her nor the subject of her film liked the original title (*This is Me: Agot Dell*) but this was defined by the commissioners' brief. She discussed this tension between what the commissioners [Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)] required and what arose from the collaborative practice in the revised statement (Massoumi, personal communication, June 27, 2017). Responding to the peer feedback gave Bilbrough the impetus to return to the work and re-engage with the creative process on her own terms: 'the *Screenworks*' review process galvanised me into re-editing the film in consultation with Agot, and in collaboration with Karen McMullan who shot the location footage' (personal communication, Feb 18, 2018). Reflecting on this process for an article in this volume. Bilbrough states that whilst practice-research can at points feel 'arduous' and sometimes 'stultifies the creative process ... *Screenworks* gives meaning to that process both in a way that is recognisable within the academy and a way that is significant as a practitioner' (personal communication, Feb 18, 2018). She

outlines how submitting her commissioned film *This is Me: Agot Dell* to *Screenworks* ‘re-energised the project through offering analytical and creative feedback that validated my concerns about the artefact as a filmmaker and required me to explore some further conceptual aspects of the research’. This enabled her to re-title and re-edit the film and successfully submit it to film festivals, winning an award at one. Bilbrough argues that the process of writing the research statement offered the opportunity to grapple with ‘pertinent questions’ about her own practice-based research, around ‘documentary as performance, tensions between the artists’ voice, the perspective of participants and the requirements of organisations and funding bodies’. Finally, Bilbrough also reflects on becoming a reviewer for *Screenworks* as ‘also energising and nourishing’. She valued the opportunity ‘to engage in ongoing critical and creative reflection’ contributing more broadly to screen practice as a discipline.

In another case, contributor, PhD Researcher and lecturer Kelly Zarins (Leeds Trinity) also found the *Screenworks* peer review process valuable, arguing that whilst ‘it can be challenging at first to find suitable platforms for publication ... engaging in research via practice-based methods’, the:

The supportive peer review process which *Screenworks* offers has marked a stand-out period in my PhD experience. It has ignited my confidence in engaging with this process. Both reviewers had constructed incredibly detailed and relevant feedback. (Personal communication, March 20, 2018)

Peer reviews for *Screenworks* are usually published anonymously, but one of Zarins’ peer reviewers, professor and filmmaker Tony Dowmunt (Goldsmiths), offered to contact her via Skype in order to support her resubmission, thus not remaining anonymous (to her at least). Dowmunt appreciated the opportunity to be able to discuss his feedback with Zarins directly: ‘the “blind” peer review process has always struck me

as being unnecessarily cold and remote when I've been on the receiving end of it myself, and I still believe wholeheartedly in personal contact as a way of learning and communicating' (personal communication, March 26, 2018). Zarins claims that this not only helped her prepare her submission, but also provided her with 'critical and constructive thinking which has resonated in my practice, going forward'.

Contributor and independent video-artist Guli Silberstein, found his experience with *Screenworks* 'a rewarding process indeed,' in terms of how the submission proforma helped him to develop the confidence to situate his own practice within the academy and disseminate it further at academic conferences, subsequently presenting at the 2017 *JMP* Symposium at Bath Spa and MeCCSA 2018 at London South Bank University (personal communication February 16, 2018).

Not only has *Screenworks* been at the forefront of developing a scholarly apparatus validating practice research within the academy, it has also contributed to the sharing of best-practice within practice-research pedagogy. The second volume was dedicated to the publication of practice research generated by the Audio Visual Practice Based PhD Support Network (AVPhD), 'an AHRC funded training and support network for all those doing, supervising and examining audio-visual practice based doctorates' which ran from 2005-2008. More recently, associate editors, Jimmy Hay and Nariman Massoumi (both at University of Bristol), have begun using the *Screenworks* submission proforma with postgraduate research students in order to help them better understand how practice can be articulated as research. According to Massoumi, practice research students on the MA Dissertation were encouraged to use *Screenworks* as a guide 'to think about the research framework of their practice using the headings on the pro

forma as a structure to approach their project' (personal communication, Feb 16, 2018). Likewise, Hay states that they used the *Screenworks* proforma on the Screen Research Methods unit 'as a resource to get the students thinking about how they can frame their filmmaking as research', claiming that students found this helpful in understanding that 'the research is the imperative in practice-as-research projects' (personal communication, Feb 19, 2018). The *Screenworks* format was an 'ideal' way to allow students to 'not only examine the practice and the way the project had been intellectually and methodologically framed, but also offered two peer reviews assessing its contribution' to new knowledge (Massoumi, personal communication, Feb 16, 2018).

Challenges: the sustainability of practice research

Despite this ongoing value, one of the major concerns that *Screenworks* is tussling with at the moment is the issue of future-proofing and sustainability and the urgent need for more infrastructural support, particularly in terms of indexing and archiving.

Notwithstanding its international recognition and influence, the fate of *Screenworks* is contingent upon what institutional support is available depending on the positions of the current editors, as well as shifting technological formats and platforms. As we will suggest, these issues are indicative of wider questions that practice research communities must address to consolidate the field.

Indeed, *Screenworks* has been migrated twice in its short history. The first migration occurred when Dovey moved to the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) and no longer had access to the University of Bristol website administration, which meant that the supporting statements and extracts from Volume 2 never made it onto the original website. Shortly after moving to UWE Dovey stood down as editor. At roughly

the same time Gareth Palmer (Salford) took over editorship of *JMP* and proposed a new joint website, www.JMPScreenworks.com, which was hosted by University of Salford and launched in 2011, with a separate section for *Screenworks* which Crofts was responsible for as the new editor in chief. Volume 1 was migrated from the original website, the supporting statements for Volume 2 were uploaded online and Volume 3 was published online only (no DVD) in June 2012. Under Crofts' editorship, by Volume 4 *Screenworks* had taken advantage of the affordances of digital publishing, becoming a rolling publication with no deadline. This meant that submissions were sent out to peer review and, if successful, published immediately they completed the peer review process, rather than waiting for a full volume before publication. Around this time the Digital Cultures Research Centre (DCRC) at UWE Bristol started to support a new associate editor, (then) postgraduate student Steve Presence.

The second migration occurred after Palmer retired in 2014. The [JMPScreenworks.com](http://www.JMPScreenworks.com) website became defunct due to the content management system still being based at Salford, leaving the *Screenworks* section stranded in a *JMP* container that was no longer being maintained: the new *JMP* editors at Bournemouth, Neal White and Julian McDougall, didn't have administrative access to the website, but generously paid for interim web-hosting to ensure that the *Screenworks* archive was not lost. At the same time, having moved from Intellect to Taylor & Francis in 2014, the possibility of embedding video directly on their new website afforded *JMP* the ability to publish moving image work directly, and a decision was made to end the formal link between *JMP* and *Screenworks* in July 2015.

At this point, the future of *Screenworks* was uncertain. In the quest to find a new home, several possibilities were explored including the idea of a video-on-demand model. However, this proposition was quickly rejected. Firstly, the ethos of open access, which is increasingly becoming a requirement in academic publishing (Eve, 2013), runs entirely counter to the pay-per-view model. Furthermore, the whole *raison d'etre* of *Screenworks* is the added value of criticality and peer review in the context of the proliferation of online video content. Indeed, in the age of Vimeo and YouTube where anyone can upload a video, the added value of verbalised research significance cannot be underestimated. These new models of evaluation and editorial practice have opened up a productive space for the articulation of academic filmmaking as research, taken up by journals like *[In]Transition* and *Sightlines*, transforming, as Jason Mittell has argued, 'the function of peer review from that of simple gatekeeping to a visible discussion about the merits and ideas of scholarship' (2017, 138). In this sense academic publishing becomes more about validation of the practice *as research*, as opposed to a simple form of dissemination or distribution. As Mittell notes:

The key value that a journal could add is not through the video itself but through the supporting materials that frame each video as academic work—we do not “publish” videos ourselves but embed them from Vimeo or Critical Commons. What we actually publish are the creator statements and peer reviews that strive to answer the question “How does this video function as scholarship?” (2017, 138)

Therefore it could be said that the publication of both the research statements and the peer reviews enables new forms of audiovisual research to gain traction within screen studies, in a way that digital distribution alone cannot.

What was clear was that *Screenworks* desperately needed to migrate to a more accessible platform, so the laborious task of transferring the first five volumes to a new,

more user-friendly site was undertaken. With the ongoing support of DCRC and the addition of a new associate editors, Alex Nevill (then a PhD researcher at UWE Bristol) and Nariman Massoumi (then senior lecturer at Bath Spa University), *Screenworks* has risen out of the ashes. The new www.screenworks.org.uk website was launched with Volume 6 in April 2016 at BAFTSS Annual Conference (University of Reading), featuring the shortlist of the BAFTSS 2016 Practice Awards. *Screenworks* is now going from strength to strength, with an expanding editorial board, currently consisting of editor in chief: Dr Charlotte Crofts (UWE Bristol), with associate editors: Dr Jimmy Hay (University of Bristol), Dr Elan Gamaker (Roehampton), Lucy Leake (Plymouth College of Art), Dr Nariman Massoumi (now at Bristol University), Alex Nevill (now at San Francisco State) and a growing body of international peer reviewers and contributors.

Future directions: archival strategies for practice research

This process of migration and the slightly precarious history of the journal attest to ongoing challenges in the field of practice research. While the affordances of the journal's online format now provide increased visibility and connectivity amongst the practice research community, the downfall is the inherently ephemeral and unreliable nature of digital media. Indeed, across the field of digital publishing there is a risk of lost content, broken links or unreadable files as Kathleen Fitzpatrick (2011, p.123) suggests in her exploration of the ways that technology is changing academic publishing:

We have centuries of practice in preserving print – means of collecting and organizing print texts, making them accessible to readers, and protecting them from damage, all standardized across many libraries with frequently redundant collections... we simply do not have centuries, or even decades, to develop parallel processes for digital preservation.

Further to this, due to implicit audiovisual components used to convey elements of practice in journals like *Screenworks*, *[In]Transition*, *Sightlines* and the *Journal of Artistic Research*, the technical format of presentation, whether MPEG video, JPEG image, or HTML code, dictates the ways that research can be accessed and stored. In the case of *Screenworks'* online video streaming for instance, all content is viewed via a web browser in Vimeo's default MPEG-4 codec. Taking up this issue of standardization Sean Cubitt (2014, p.251) highlights how MPEG-4, among other codecs, utilises a restricted colour pallet and intra-frame compression in an attempt toward greater efficiency for online streaming:

the efforessence of image particles and microtemporalities within the frame risks shattering the unity and discretion of the image... Coherence is achieved then by nominating as redundant the mass of detail, colour and nuance that human observation is capable of. Instead, the take of observing is first modelled on good-enough solution for an imaginary statistical norm of perception and then the process of selecting what to observe is automated.

Although some practice research may be presented through lower quality imagery or audio and therefore not drastically effected by this compression, in general the work we encounter through *Screenworks* is carefully crafted by authors who desire the best possible viewing context. At the time of writing, a typical MPEG-4 compressed version of a film, audiovisual essay or other video content such as performance or exhibition documentation might contain as little as fifty percent of the information compared to the original capture format of the work. This detail is never regained – the original data is replaced by interpolations generated through neighbouring pixels and frames. Much of the fidelity is lost and essentially guessed by an algorithm. Although the work may seem comparable to an audience (efficiency codecs are designed to produce results that are visually and audibly indistinct to the original), the challenge of compression becomes clear when considering archival purposes and the longevity of a research

publication as further migration of the content to better display formats in future is at risk of being limited by diminished streaming versions.

Hence, with *Screenworks'* coming of age, it is now becoming increasingly important to develop a preservation strategy in order to make the journal sustainable. As can be seen by the migration from the original *ScreenWork* DVD distributed with *JMP*, to the joint *JMPScreenworks.com* website to the current website at www.screenworks.org.uk, the fate of the journal has been determined by the changing institutional circumstances of its editors, as well as the vagaries of rapidly changing technologies. As outlined above, the videos remain hosted on the contributors' Vimeo accounts, over which the editors have no direct control. Furthermore, the journal is dependent on online platforms which, as we have seen with the likes of *Vine.com*, are by no means guaranteed to have longevity in this rapidly changing digital age.

Screenworks is actively exploring options for future-proofing work. As Nevill points out 'in addition to the formative peer-review process and opportunities for knowledge exchange that are afforded by academic journals, another key publishing incentive is the preservation of one's work' (2018). Given the stated issues of video and audio compression, video resolution, codecs and accessing legacy formats, such as DVD, for moving image works, the process of archiving is much more complex than a traditional journal. The solution to this archival challenge must therefore be twofold; firstly obtaining high-quality master copies of audiovisual content; and secondly finding a safe and searchable storage solution to successfully preserve this content for future researchers. Given the dialogue between text and practice that *Screenworks* aspires

towards, an appropriate archival solution should also be able to store the written and audiovisual material alongside one another and maintain their co-existence.

Screenworks is drawn upon here as an example given the journal's history of development alongside the emergence of the field of practice research. The aforementioned publications all face these challenges, although some have greater institutional support which reduces the potential risk. The Research Catalogue website, upon which *JAR* is based for instance, is hosted and backed up by the KTH Royal Technology Institute in Stockholm. Editor-in-chief Michael Schwab recognizes the issue of sustainability for *JAR* however, characterising the Research Catalogue (RC) as a 'living archive' and suggesting that 'for now SAR and the RC are growing indicating sufficient support and shoulders to carry the project. If at some point, the living archive was to die, static pages would have to be hosted either exported and distributed into the various institutions's repositories or in an archival version of the RC itself' (personal communication, August 11, 2018). Similarly, *[In]Transition* is part of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies' Media Commons initiative and as such the website is archived by the New York University Digital Library Technology Services. Like *Screenworks*, *[In]Transition* relies on author-uploaded Vimeo content and as the journal's project manager Jason Mittell attests 'these videos are self-posted by the creator, so they are in charge of their own archiving. I realize this is far from best practice' (personal communication, August 9, 2018).

If we do not correctly master, store and care for our practice-research artefacts any claims to knowledge or understanding are potentially redundant as, in the case of *Screenworks*, the intrinsic moving image content may become inaccessible. As we have

outlined, this risk is particularly heightened for research featuring moving imagery due to the inbuilt obsolescence of capture and display equipment as well as the widespread use of online streaming efficiency codecs. We are now actively pursuing archive and indexing solutions for *Screenworks* and would welcome any suggestions from the digital publishing community.

Conclusion

Practice has become much more accepted as research by both HEFCE and AHRC. However, the anxieties outlined in our introduction are still being expressed post-REF2014. Whilst the report for REF Sub-Panel 36 for Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management stated that 'practice has consolidated its status as equal to traditional research outputs' (cited in Callaghan and McDougall, 2016, 123), the sub-panel still suggested a need for practice researchers to 'better articulate' the research element in their submissions. In response to this, the AHRC-funded Filmmaking Research Network was set up in order to 'develop understanding and consolidate the field of filmmaking research by sharing best practice internationally and developing resources', with a particular emphasis on mapping the field with a view to joining up often 'fragmentary' practices across disciplines and national boundaries, with a view to identifying what infrastructure is needed to strengthen the field as a whole.

Peer review of practice research continues to provide an important space for defining new forms of scholarship and validating them as research. The work of peer review undertaken by *Screenworks* contributes to defining the field and strengthening the

practice research environment. Both the submission *and* peer review processes, with their various degrees of openness and transparency, engender an open dialogue between scholars, a dialectic between the contextualising research statement and peer review through which new knowledge can emerge. One of the advantages of being an independent online publication, is the ability to be fleet of foot which has enabled the journal to remain open, flexible and responsive. Yet there is also an urgent need to consolidate and future-proof this work for subsequent generations of practice researchers, 'providing a stable and consistent environment in which we can produce our research on an equal footing with colleagues in other disciplines' (Callaghan and McDougall, 2016, 124). Furthermore, Callaghan and McDougall (2016, 126) call for the need to move beyond being reactive, suggesting that instead the practice research community needs to 'focus outwards and make interventions within the wider research landscape'. It is hoped that *Screenworks* will continue to contribute to this outward-looking intervention, offering an open celebration of practice research in its diverse forms that can not only inspire and cohere the practice research community of the future, but also inform the wider disciplines in which screen based media research take place.

(Word count = 6580)

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