

## **SCREEN PRODUCTION AND RESEARCH COLLABORATION**

### **SPARC:**

Developing a Collaborative National Postgraduate Research Program for 22  
Australian Film Schools

### **SPARC Feedback and Brainstorming June-July 2012**

The following text is a modified version of the PowerPoint content presented at the first state SPARC colloquiums (April/May 2012).

You are invited to contribute to this presentation with your feedback. While your feedback is important the main reason for asking you at this time is to inspire further discussions on postgraduate research at the state level.

To help you with this task the PP content has been arranged as a sequence of numbered propositions, with some new information and some rhetorical questions. If you agree with the broad flow of the argument can you please tick the relevant “boxes” or “diamonds”.

You can also enter brief comments in the space provided; alternatively you may offer suggestions as to how the proposition expressed should be modified and qualified; you may add new references and material to it, or disagree with it altogether.

Hopefully this will help you frame your own unique position on the topic of developing postgraduate research in the ASPERA sector. You are encouraged to write as much as you wish at the end of the document as a way of developing a paper on the project. You are invited to present this paper at the National Colloquium in 2013 and publish it in IM refereed e-journal.

Elements of this writing and your comments are likely to be incorporated in this project’s final report, namely, A National Strategic Plan for sustainable postgraduate research development in Australian film schools.. It would be appropriate to have your comments attributed to you unless you indicate otherwise (see the last question - 37).

Josko Petkovic  
Project Leader

**DEVELOPING A COLLABORATIVE NATIONAL POSTGRADUATE  
RESEARCH PROGRAM FOR 22 AUSTRALIAN FILM SCHOOLS**

YOUR NAME:

INSTITUTION:

**Tick the “squares” and “diamonds” if you agree or think that the proposition is reasonable. You may add comments in the space provided at the end:**

- 1. Practice-based postgraduate research in screen production requires a substantial level of funding. (*Are there alternative “cheaper” ways of doing research?*)
  
- 2. Finding funds for postgraduate research in screen production is very difficult. (*Have we looked at all the funding sources?*)
  
- 3. Scriptwriting is a “cheap” way of doing practice-based PhD. However, many PhD projects end up as abstract scriptwriting exercises for abstract audiences. Worthwhile market-oriented script concepts are quickly appropriated by the small but overpopulated industry while the rest are starved of funds by omission.
  
- 4. Without viable practice-based postgraduate research the ASPERA sector will become academically irrelevant. (*How about teach-only institutions?*)
  
- 5. There is a widely held belief within the ASPERA sector that development of practice-based postgraduate research is impeded because it is difficult to fund the high costs of production.

6. This perception is affirmed by 90% of those who participated in the preliminary SPARC survey. The 11 responses to question 54 on the present level of funding for practice-based postgraduate research projects stated:

- Untenable for most practice-based projects
- Insufficient but manageable with various restrictions
- Insufficient but manageable with various restrictions
- Insufficient but manageable with various restrictions
- Untenable for most practice-based projects
- Untenable for most practice-based projects
- Adequate
- Insufficient but manageable with various restrictions
- Untenable for most practice-based projects
- Untenable for most practice-based projects
- Insufficient but manageable with various restrictions

7. This perception is supported by DEEWR/DIISRTE statistics for award completions. Creative Arts which shows a low level of PhD completions. (see attachment)

8. The SPARC survey confirms as much - the number of PhD completions for the first 11 institutions is uneven. If the top three institutions are excluded the figure is quite small.

**Q42 How many PhD completions, in total (including staff listed in Q19) have you had in the last 3 years?**

- 7
- 12
- 
- 1
- 1
- 1
- 5
- 
- 0
- 1
- 0
- 1

9. Linking postgraduate projects with the screen industry is one way of dealing with this funding problem. However establishing such industry links has been most difficult and all attempts to do so have come to little. Even academic staff who are undertaking postgraduate studies find it

difficult to get “industry” funding. This situation is likely to change but not soon enough. We should continue trying to change the status quo.

10. Another way of introducing funds into the ASPERA sector is through ARC-based grant-based research projects with postgraduate places. There is a whole range of these grants available to researchers.

11. With only a few exceptions, ASPERA researchers have not been very successful in getting ARC grants for practice-based research projects in screen production and with screen producers as Principle Chief Investigators. The SPARC Survey affirms as much.

**Q46 How many major (non-practice) competitive grants (\$100,000+) do you currently host?**

- CRC (DIISR) 0
- State Grants 1
- ARC Centre of Excellence 0
- ARC Linkage 0
- Large ARC Discovery 1
- Large ALTC 1

12. ARC Linkage grants numbers are somewhat better (and worth discussing as a funding option)

**Q47 How many practice-based research grants (\$100,000+) do you currently host?**

- CRC (DIISR) 0
- State Grants 0
- ARC Centre of Excellence 0
- ARC Linkage 7
- Large ARC Discovery 2
- Large ALTC 0

13. As a broad generality, the researchers from the ASPERA sector do not get ARC grants for practice-based research because of the costly element of this type of research is not in the conceptual analysis but in the cost of the production itself (specifically in the materiality of the text and the

rhetorical devices used to produce the filmic text - car-chases, exploding buildings, special effects, expensive actors). Generally ARC regulations exclude this type of expenditure. This situation is not likely to change much in the future! Research into cancer cures will always win over exploding buildings and special effects?!

Accordingly, ARC funding will intrinsically tend to exclude projects with high production costs and will prioritize (i) conventional analytical, statistical and technological research. None of these are directly relevant to practice-based research in screen production.

14. Sub-conclusion 1: Not being able to get ARC or “industry” funding represents a major barrier for postgraduates and staff in the ASPERA sector.
15. Most academics and their postgraduates will persist with practice-based research of their own – probably on a small scale working on local projects using hybrid (and mostly non-ARC) funding sources.
16. Some screen production academics have given up and have accepted a “teaching-only” status. *Is this a viable option for us? If you agree that the “teaching-only” status is a viable option for us then you may also agree with the following propositions – tick if you agree:*
- ◇ The ASPERA sector should focus primarily on teaching and training screen producers and not on research.
  - ◇ MA is a natural terminal degree for screen producers.
  - ◇ Research is research and creativity is creativity and the two shall never meet.
- Or
- ◇ Research is antithetical to creative practice.

- ◇ Research is not all that profitable and should be left to one or two institutions in Australia.

17. We live in a competitive world. Each institution should forge ahead with its own research development and positively disregard collaboration that will help other institutions develop research programs.

18. For most academics the “teaching-only” option is untenable and the inability to fund their practice-based research and that of their postgraduates represent a major problem.

19. Another complication is that ASPERA sector is no longer considered to be “fashionable” within academic circles? There is a perception that screen production is an “old” medium.

**EXISTING**

Solitary author creator  
Creative works  
Linear  
Audience-based  
Ephemeral  
User friendly screen-based  
Little funding available

**NEW**

IT, CGE-based  
Data, archive and net-based  
Hyper-textual – web, cloud  
Interactive  
Additive (ie. Google Earth + photos)  
User-friendly but program complex  
Fashionable with politicians

20. In contrast to our funding problems commercially lucrative image-based inventions are being developed by Google and others with an enormous amount of capital.

- ◇ Given all these developments can we and our postgraduates describe ourselves as being on the cutting edge of research? *Find something positive to say here.*

- ◇ Are we really promoting world-class image-making? *Find something positive to say.*

- ◇ Are we presently competing with TAFE and AFTRS with ever-greater numbers? *Find something that differentiates us from TAFE.*
- ◇ Have we ceased creating new generations of practice-based scholars and leaders in our discipline?
- ◇ The sector needs to be ahead of the existing developments in our discipline and not run behind them.
- ◇ The sector needs to be on the cutting edge for industry to follow.

This is the research task that the sector needs to address.

21. Taking Stock: Our strength is in our combined numbers, our research capacity, capability and practice-based research methodology, as well as our ability to engage with local issues while thinking globally. With our numbers we can create a super-university Screen Production and Research Collaboration (SPARC) Centre with super research capacity including lobbying influence. Together we can create a national research network consisting of hubs, nodes and local knowledge (narratives) trails; we can then use these to create projects at a higher level of conceptualization instead of ephemeral productions by solitary producers.

22. National Importance and Priority: If we work collaboratively we should be able to identify an important area of research that has local, national and international importance.

23. Funding: Because such activities are important the sector should be able to get funding for this research.



24. Staff-led + postgraduate places: We can only do this if the project is staff-led and funding is in place before postgraduate students are invited to join specific projects.



25. By collaborating in this fashion it is possible for the sector to become big and small simultaneously. We can become big by creating a national collaborative network – a super university SPARC Centre - and small by directing the centre towards local end-user issues and clients.

- ◇ collaboration introduces a new territory for us because we can undertake research that would be difficult to undertake as a single institution.
- ◇ collaboration makes it possible to explore new paradigms of research in screen production.
- ◇ a collaborative network will dovetail directly into the NBN development. No other humanities sector is as suited for exploring the potential of this network as the ASPERA sector
- ◇ collaboration does not exclude other (previous mentioned) funding alternatives (ARC, Screen Australia)
- ◇ collaboration will raise consciousness regarding research and hopefully will lead to solutions to our funding and postgraduate research problems



26. Together we can also lobby effectively against the perception that we are an old medium:

- ◇ the production of audio-visual text is the very foundation of communication in the contemporary world and research is an important element of this.
- ◇ ASPERA's programs are greatly desired by students.
- ◇ What Australia needs is a vibrant creative sector for it to be a creative nation. Screen producers have the undergraduate, postgraduate and staff teams all over Australia to work on this.
- ◇ ASPERA's group-based methodology is intrinsically interdisciplinary which is a rare and much valued quality and an ideal foundation of the future creative industries.

- ◇ Screen-based text have a major social and community impact and are highly valued.
- ◇ Our impact is self-evident - we are invited by many organizations and disciplines to work with them on research projects.
- ◇ Many disadvantaged groups in our society need our services to represent them
- ◇ ERA has assessed the research standards for most institutions in our sector as being of the world standard (or better) and are thus worthy of continuing support
- ◇ The emergence of NBN has confirmed our value at yet another crucial medium of communication.

27. For all these reasons we should persist in our search for solutions to our postgraduate funding problem described above.

28. With our intrinsic interdisciplinary approach and group work, with our community contacts, we are ideally placed to do this work with postgraduates, undergraduates and TAFE students.

We need to show leadership on this at the national level and speak with commitment, confidence and passion.

If we do not enter this area quickly others will take it up.

29. Forming an association of institutional equals to discuss these issues is the primary aim of this OLT project. The working title of this research association is the SPARC Centre – Screen Production and Research Collaboration Centre.

Raising consciousness regarding research matters is the first task of the centre. This in turn will strengthen the ASPERA sector as a whole.

30. Would you like to be listed as a founding member of the SPARC Research Centre on the SPARC website and participate in these strategic discussions.

◇ YES

◇ NO

31. Another task of the SPARC Centre is to develop collaborative research projects. These can include:

- University-based research projects with selected collaborators
- state-based collaborative research projects
- national collaboration research projects
- collaborative projects with international partners
- CRC application in 2013 (and if this is too early then ... )
- CRC application in 2014

32. Elsewhere I have suggested for the SPARC Centre initiate a CRC grant application with postgraduate places. This is a major undertaking that requires a major effort from all partners.

CRC: Strength and weakness of the sector

◇ CRC grants are not directly ARC-based but user-based and our sector is never short of clients that wish to have our services.

◇ Prior to ERA we were unrecognized. We should be able to use our previous invisibility and lack of support as a reason for special attention to our sector.

33. If we go ahead with a CRC grant application it ought to be directly related to screen production otherwise it will not be competitive. The general rule for CRC bids is that the best experts in the country in the CRC bid discipline should be named in the application. We have these experts in

screen production but not in other disciplines. This should not exclude experts from other disciplines however these other experts should not drive the themes for our project. Letting experts from other disciplines set the grant application themes defeats our own aspirations and negates our value. It also means that other competitive bids can use the same “experts” to our disadvantage.

34. If we do go ahead with a CRC application we need to find committed end-users with an important problem and an innovative research theme to solve the end-user’s problem? In summary we need projects that are:

collaborative project (state, national, international)  
big research Idea – “Grand” Idea  
important research Idea  
useful idea (local, national and international)  
original idea  
narrative-based  
dramatic and dynamic narrative  
recordable in images and other media platforms  
data-based, archive-based and net-based  
Additive and ongoing  
hyper-textual  
Interactive  
grant-based  
staff-led  
centre-based  
with postgraduate (and post-doctoral) places.

35. If you are considered as research active by your institution would you like to listed as an active researcher in the SPARC Research Centre.

◇ YES

◇ NO

36. Can you indicate how you are able to contribute to research grant application - as:

- ◇ PhD researcher or
- ◇ institutional recognized PhD equivalent researcher
- ◇ Postdoctoral Fellow
- ◇ Early career researcher
- ◇ Mature age researcher
- ◇ Chief Investigator
- ◇ Principle Chief Investigator
- ◇ Research Project Leader
- ◇ SPARC Centre leadership
- ◇ Mentor
- ◇ Other (detail)

37. Research Intentions: In the next 12 months do you intent to:

- ◇ Carry on with your unfunded research project(s) if you have one.
- ◇ Carry on with your industry funded research project (if you have one already)
- ◇ Carry on with your ARC project (if you have one already)
- ◇ Apply for small OLT/ ALTC grant project
- ◇ Apply for a large OLT/ ALTC grant project
- ◇ Apply for small ARC Discovery grant project
- ◇ Apply for a large ARC Discovery grant project
- ◇ Apply for an ARC Linkage grant
- ◇ Apply for competitive grants with international partners
- ◇ Apply for corporate funding
- ◇ Apply for state funding
- ◇ Contribute to SPARC CRC grant application
- ◇ Other (detail)
- ◇

38. What collaborative research topic is of most interest to you?

39. Are you happy for some of these comments to be included as quotes in the final report, namely in A National Strategic Plan for sustainable postgraduate research development in Australian film schools”

- ◇ Yes, as long as the quoted comments are attributed to me.
- ◇ Yes, as long as my name is not included with the quoted comments
- ◇ No, I don't want my comments to be quoted.

ADDITIONAL REMARKS:

TO: The Honorable Minister for the Arts, Mr Simon Crean, MP  
RE: National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper: University-Industry Links

Date: October 2011

The Honorable Minister,

We, the undersigned are members of the ALTC-funded Innovation and Development project entitled *Developing Collaborative National Postgraduate Research Program for 22 Australian Films Schools*.

Collectively, we welcome the four national cultural policy goals identified by the National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper – diversity, innovation & participation, excellence and socio-economic goals.

We are now writing to you to draw your attention to:

- (i) the importance of the emerging university creative arts research sector in attaining these goals;
- (ii) and to underline the need for the establishment of strong research links between the creative industries and the university creative arts research sector.

A range of federal government policies already endorses this type of university-industry research linkage including the Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant Scheme and the Cooperative Research Centers (CRC) Program administered by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR).

While the principle of university-industry research links is welcomed by most, in practice this is not always acted on in the creative arts – most probably because practice-based research in creative arts is a comparatively recent development and its importance is yet to be recognized fully by a range of cultural organizations and policy makers.

We specifically wish to draw your attention to the policies of the existing federal and state screen funding organizations which do not endorse or encourage university-industry research linkage. For historical reasons these organizations have grown distant from the university research sector and this distance is maintained today by what we consider to be outdated and inappropriate funding policies that are counterproductive to all. For example postgraduate practice-based researchers are excluded from accessing production funding through government film financing organizations as a matter of policy. This is in stark contrast to other industries that do recognize the importance of succession planning and that do support the new generation of postgraduates. Without such succession planning and rejuvenation there is a great risk of ossification and decline in the effectiveness of these screen funding

organizations and in the industry as a whole. Accordingly, we consider it in the national interest that the funding anomaly, which excludes postgraduate researchers from accessing screen industry funds, be corrected. We recommend that this be done with a clear policy directive from the Minister to the screen funding organizations.

If the funding policies of these organizations were changed and realigned with the funding policies of other comparable industries we are confident that this would give a major impetus to the four cultural policies goals mentioned in your National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper while unleashing the research potential of 22 Australian film schools. The likely outcome of such funding realignment will be a flow of innovation from the university sector to the industry that may well lead to a new kind of renaissance in the screen and related industries. Failure to do this will have consequences that are equally dramatic, in our opinion, as Australia will have two areas of major cultural investment, namely the university research sector and the screen funding sector, which are effectively working against one another. This will greatly harm our international competitiveness in what is arguably a vital area of economic and cultural development.

The nature of the problem as we see it is set out in the attached document. Should you have any questions on this matter our team would be more than happy to assist in any way we can.

Dr Josko Petkovic, (Project Leader), NASS, Murdoch University, Western Australia  
Associate Professor Gillian Leahy, UTS, New South Wales  
Professor Ian Lang, VCA, Melbourne University, Victoria  
Leo Berkeley, RMIT University, Victoria  
Professor Herman Van Eyken, Griffith University Film School, Queensland  
Nicholas Oughton, Griffith University Film School, Queensland  
Alison Wotherspoon, Flinders University, South Australia

## CREATIVE ARTS RESEARCH: UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY LINKS

Most research-based industries in Australia have direct and constructive links with the university research sector. Researchers move easily between universities and industry in both directions, in science, medicine, engineering, law, economics just to name a few. Most industries welcome value added R&D contribution from the university sector and are happy to fully or partly fund this partnership. Similarly, the Federal government wants the university researchers to link with industry and to add value to it through their research projects. The Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant Scheme and the Cooperative Research Centers (CRC) Program administered by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR) were created for this reason. Both schemes are sensitive to the sustainable and renewable needs of research and usually encourage grant applications that include postdoctoral fellowships, postgraduate researchers and early career researchers.

**Historical Anomaly:** In contrast to most other complex industries the film industry did not start with any direct links with the university research sector. This is because there was no tertiary film training or research in Australia until 1969. As a consequence a different R&D arrangement arose following the emergence of the 1970s Australian New Wave film industry. At that time screen researchers consisted of heroic individuals associated with public and private organizations such as Film Australia, Australian Film Commission, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, AFTRS, along with a range of state-based public and private organization including Film West, Film Victoria, South Australian Film Corporation and FTO. Many of these organizations funded and managed a range of developmental, experimental, and innovative schemes.

**Emerging Potential:** During this time the university sector provided mostly undergraduate training. Master of Arts was the high-end qualification for creative artists in general. However in the last three decades the situation has changed greatly following a rapid growth of students attending the university-based screen production programs. The 2011 AFTRS Corporate Plan describes it well:

Communications and media courses are high demand courses in the tertiary sector. In 2008 the sector (including both public and private higher education providers) offered 1055 qualifications that specialised, or offered a major study component in communications and/or creative arts. Of these 1055 qualifications, 537 are undergraduate qualifications and 518 are postgraduate qualifications. These numbers illustrate the strength of demand for education and training in screen and related creative industries.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to AFTRS there are now over 20 university-based film schools that cater for these students in Australia and each year this number keeps growing by popular demand.<sup>2</sup> The most exciting element of this development is that the best students are now going on to do honours and higher research degree programs including PhD. These are practice-based research programs that give rise to creative works as their principle outcome. As a result some of the best filmmakers from the industry can now be found in the university sector as teaching staff and many are themselves undertaking higher research degrees. So much so that the division between creative

filmmakers and researchers has mostly disappeared within the university sector. Creative works are now recognized as research and publication category by the Australian Research Council (since 2000) and are audited as such by the Excellence of Research in Australia (ERA) scheme.

**Paradigm Shift:** The practice-based research has now replaced the haphazard process that awaited filmmakers when there were no university research programs, and when after graduation filmmakers were required to starve or mortgage their houses. This type of spontaneous creative development can still take place outside tertiary institutions but it is becoming less frequent and is found mostly in places where the concentration of the industry is large enough to support it with an equivalent research programs. Large corporations and organizations such as Hollywood studios and BBC are practice-based universities in their own right – as are Google and Microsoft. These organizations are able to support their own creative practitioners right up to the cutting edge of the industry development and each year we marvel at the new inventions they bring to us. The internal research structures of these corporations could well be conceptualised as top end practice-based research centres, that go beyond PhD, and postdoctoral development.

Unaided research development cannot take place in countries such as Australia with its small film industry – or medical industry for that matter. In general terms, small industries can only support small innovations when such projects are expensive to carry out. However, university-based research programs are an efficient way of dealing with this problem. Research programs identify graduate candidates with greatest potential and support their development often with postgraduate scholarships. This process has served Australia well in advanced fields such as medicine and many areas of science and there is no reason to doubt that it will work for a sophisticated activity such as the film industry. For all these reasons practice-based research in creative arts is arguably one of the most innovative, relevant and influential research methodologies available to a small nation such as Australia.

**The New Order:** It is no longer wise to return to the heroic “starving artist” scenario with Master of Arts qualification. The economic potential of the new media products and the competition that this potential inspires has created a global industry that requires an ever-higher level of knowledge, research and technological sophistication. Within this perspective we take it as self-evident that to train a successful screen industry professional requires continuous training and support from undergraduate 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 the post-doctoral sections of academia – as is the case with other complex industries. The successful Pixar company provides a good case in point. It grew from a collection of researchers with PhD qualifications. Dick Shoup, the inventor of SuperPaint program had a PhD in Computer Science from Carnegie Mellon, Alvi Ray Smith was a mathematician who wrote his PhD thesis on *automata* theory, Ed Catmull had a PhD in Physics. Jon McCormack is a good example of such creative intelligence in Australia.<sup>3</sup> While these are all examples of technical intervention in the art of filmmaking the same logic holds for all disciplines that go into the production of image-based texts.

Practice-based research outputs from 22 Australian film schools dovetails neatly in the four “goals” identified in National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper, namely a diversity goal, an innovation and participation goal, an excellence goal and socio-economic goal. It should be noted that the most recent Excellence of Research in Australia (ERA) audit almost every Australian university-based film school that was audited was rated at the world standard or above.

If harnessed properly these film schools represent an enormous reservoir of creative capability. Screen industry can benefit greatly from the value-added potential that exists in these schools. Linking university researchers with industry practice and industry funding is essential for the university sector as well, because practice-based research, like science research, is generally resource intensive and expensive. Ideally one would want there to be an unimpeded university-industry R&D exchange similar to exchange that exists in other complex industries today and as is encouraged by the existing federal policies.

**Exclusion:** In these circumstances it is surprising to find little if any linkage between the university research sector and the screen industry. This is mostly because the film funding bodies act as funding gatekeepers for industry projects and instead of facilitating links with the university R&D sector, they make it a point of principle to exclude the university sector from the industry. For example, postgraduate candidates are not eligible to apply for any production funds related to their research projects as indicated earlier. The funding bodies do this because they consider their own funds to be “non-educational” and reject the idea that anyone from the tertiary institution should have access to these “non-educational” funds. They considered this to be an example of inappropriate “double dipping” of non-educational funds by educational institutions – an institutional taboo – even when the students in question are research students. Paradoxically the same organizations are more than happy to collaborate with print based researchers and it seems that to them the notion of research excludes practice-based research.

This funding exclusion invokes an archaic period when:

- filmmaking was something undertaken only after university studies and when division between education and practical filmmaking was indeed real and self evident
- university students if they did any filmmaking were trained (at an undergraduate level) and did not participated in value added research
- research was thought to be based on a written analysis and thesis only
- the art of filmmaking and academia were considered antithetical
- high-end degree for creative artist was Master of Arts
- all universities were fully funded government organizations
- students did not pay any tuition fees

None of these reasons are valid today.

We now have a situation in which high quality and innovative creative practices, emerging naturally from the university sector are being excluded from industry funds by the policies of the film funding bodies simply because these projects arise from the university sector. In many instances the funding bodies tell postgraduates that their projects have merit and will be funded as long as they renounce their links with the university.

From a national interest point of view this is clearly a situation in which everyone misses out. The industry misses out on potential value-added research from 22 film schools. The researcher in the film schools will miss out even more since they do not have access to industry funds. This is not without consequences. The project support available to postgraduates for duration of his or her candidature at the present moment are very modest and are usually of the order of \$2500. In contrast, potential funds offered to “emerging filmmakers” from state and federal funding bodies could be as much as \$150,000.<sup>4</sup> Thus, at the completion of an Honours program, the best of the new generation of screen production students have an unenviable choice of either going on to do a PhD with minimal support or to abandon their studies and be potentially funded by as much as \$150,000.

**The Problem:** How can one explain the behaviour of the funding organizations? Why did they not recognize the changing landscape of the film production and the role that the university research sector can contribute to it? We consider that the problem has arisen primarily because of the ambiguous policies that underpin the funding organizations, which simultaneously are required to be cultural organizations as well as industry organizations. As cultural organizations they seek out the most vibrant, innovative and relevant aspects of the culture. This is essentially an innovative research selection process not all that different from that undertaken by the Australian Research Council in conventional research development. However as industry-focused organizations these funding bodies also need to optimise direct and indirect commercialization of the productions they fund.

While these two policy aims are admirable they also tend to work against one another and combining them together within each funding organization can have most unfortunate consequences that serves neither policy aims and potentially undercuts both. At the present moment it is possible for the funding organizations to justify subsidising poor commercial productions on cultural grounds while innovative cultural projects can be rejected on perceived commercial ground. In the worse case scenario this sliding culture-commerce criteria can give rise to works that are commercially unsuccessful and work that is dull and mediocre is most respects.

**Long-term Recommendation:** We are of the firm opinion that the cultural brief for the creative arts funding organization should be based on the cutting-edge cultural research and innovation. The Australian Research Council provides a good model for how such projects can be selected for funding – the selection should be based on research excellence in the first instance and unimpeded by other considerations except for the judgment of peers and by the research priorities set by the government. Similarly we are of the opinion that commercialization of the cultural IP should rest on its own self-evident successes or failures. If these contradictory functions were

separated innovation would be liberated and the commercialization of projects would be self-evident.

Accordingly, we recommend that, as a long-term aim, government should separate the research/innovation and commercialization components of its creative arts funding agencies and film funding organizations in particular.

**Short-term Recommendation:** Our position is predicated on a strongly held conviction that linking creative researchers from the university sector and the industry will increase the quality and the volume of creative output in Australia. We are happy for these assertions to be tested gradually, over time and on the basis of evidence. Accordingly we recommend that realignment of funding bodies should be gradual and evolutionary.

During the interim period we recommend that all barriers to university-industry research links be removed. We suggest that this be done by a policy directive to funding organizations, as this is probably the most efficient way of inculcating a new institutional mindset. Ideally such a policy directive should have succession planning and the university-industry research linkage as a pre-condition for all project funding as this is in the long-term national interest. It is also a convention already encouraged by the existing federal linkage policies.

Dr Josko Petkovic, October 2011

On behalf of *Developing Collaborative National Postgraduate Research Program for 22 Australian Film Schools* project team, October 2011

Notes:

1. *AFTRS Corporate Plan 2010-2011 for the Planning Period 2008-2011*, AFTRS 2010, p. 8.
2. University film schools include the following universities: Bond, COFA, CSU, Curtin, Deakin, ECU, Flinders, Griffith, Macquarie, Murdoch, UoN, Notre Dame, UWA, QUT, RMIT, Swinburne, UC, UniSA, UTS, UWS, VCA, in addition to AFTRS.
3. The Abstract of Jon McCormack's thesis *The Application of L-systems and Developmental Models to Computer Art, Animation and Music Synthesis* is informative in this regard:  
<http://www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jonmc/research/thesis.html>
4. For example see Screen Australia's Talent Escalator Program: Short Programs "Springboard : Short Film Initiative":  
[http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/industry\\_support/Development/TalEsc\\_springboard.asp](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/industry_support/Development/TalEsc_springboard.asp)  
Also see FTI HyperLink <http://www.fti.asn.au/make/fund/hyperlink>

