

**Introduction to the ASPERA Journal Special Issue: creativity matters, part one (2022) (Editorial)**

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## EDITORIAL

Studies in Australasian Cinema ASPERA Journal Special Issue 2022

Guest Editors: Margaret McVeigh, Aurora Scheelings, Joanne Tindale and Joseph Grogan

The Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA) 2022 Conference *Creativity Matters: Poetics. Pedagogy. Production. Policy.* was held at Griffith Film School, Griffith University, Brisbane from Monday 11 July to Wednesday 13 July 2022.

The conference explored matters regarding creativity across all areas of research and teaching in Australian higher education institutions today and into the future. It acknowledged the fact that the screen industry is changing rapidly. New generations of storytellers are entering the scene resulting in competition for career opportunities and funding. In this environment, universities play a pivotal role in educating students to work creatively and collaboratively in local and global scenarios.

In this Studies in Australasian Cinema ASPERA Special Issue, we are pleased to present research arising from the papers presented at the conference. It includes matters regarding teaching and researching the poetics of screen-based storytelling in higher education, particularly around matters of Indigenous and diverse voices, the collaborative input of key creatives, ideas that impact and the finding of the global in the local in screen-based storytelling. It investigates the pedagogy of how we may educate undergraduate and post graduate students to be more innovative, creative and entrepreneurial during and beyond their film school experience. It highlights how we may integrate our research and teaching to creatively address industry production imperatives to work collaboratively in co-productions, to embrace new technologies in screen-based productions, as well as how higher education institutions can lead change and innovation in the industry.

The conference theme of *Poetics* in Australian Indigenous storytelling and collaborations are explored in an international cross-cultural film school co-production in Burgess, Mace and Moyes' Special Research Report *Animating Country*. Their research discusses the Australian outback experience of students and staff from Falmouth University, England and Griffith Film School, Australia and two Australian Indigenous Elders who collaborated on an animation, inspired by local Dreamtime narratives. The project's objectives centred on student experiences and outcomes, underscored by the central question of 'how do we encourage and enable students to tell meaningful stories in a cross-cultural context?' This initiative provided an opportunity for students to develop a sensitivity to the cultural context/s of their practice via animation storytelling. A five-minute stop motion animation, *Butterfly Dreaming* (2019), was co-created over two weeks with the Guwa-Koa Traditional Owners as part of the Vision Splendid Outback Film Festival. This paper explores the challenges of aiming for 'authentic stories' on Indigenous land across Western and traditional cultures. The limitations of using primarily stop-motion animation, of working 'in the field', and of animating with only those materials found in the landscape, were deliberate choices designed to promote creativity, ingenuity and a close and tactile engagement with the environment.

The course was designed to facilitate students' cultural inquiry and critical awareness of Australia's colonial history through open dialogue, discussion and co-production, whilst gaining first-hand insights into the ethics of cross-cultural co-production.

The themes of *Poetics* and *Production* are explored through “*Wildlife Watcher Kylie: Co-designing a virtual ambassador for the Koala Watch program*”. Zelenskaya and Rundle-Thiele analyse the creative collaboration between Griffith University and Redland City Council (RCC) to develop and test an interactive virtual ambassador as part of a koala conservation campaign. Their paper proposes best practice in the design and implementation of a virtual wildlife ambassador to create awareness of the need for koala preservation amid increasing urbanisation. The social media platform “Wildlife Watcher AU” was established on Facebook and Instagram, providing an innovative approach to empowering wildlife conservation and a new conservation demographic, 25 years of age and under. A virtual ambassador, Kylie, was created allowing interactive audience engagement across a range of educational and entertaining media content that supported the channel's wildlife conservation agenda. This paper analyses the step-by-step co-design and implementation process within this community-based program. Critical design considerations are examined that may affect engagement with a virtual ambassador on social media, including ethical concerns, interactivity requirements, and the risk of Uncanny Valley effects. The project succeeded in optimising attention from a broader audience, providing new insights into the marketing potential of virtual ambassadors within the wildlife conservation area.

The themes of *Production* and *Pedagogy* are investigated by Sergi, Fitchett, and Fisher in *University Film Schools at the Heart of Creative Collaborations with Industry: A Case Study*. The paper outlines the successful collaboration between Bond University and external production companies to develop, shoot and post-produce the feature film *The Fear of Darkness* (Chris Fitchett, 2015). The low-budget, high concept film is a supernatural thriller about a young psychiatrist who investigates the disappearance of a university student. Their paper argues that the feature film production model provides mutually beneficial opportunities for students, alumni and staff to gain on-the-ground industry experience, professional networks and screen credits. At the same time production companies benefit from access to equipment, a production office and shooting locations at the University. The authors discuss the organisational challenges, learnings and opportunities this academic-industry collaboration presents.

The themes of *Poetics* and *Policy* including diversity and representation, are explored in Tindale's research “Investigating older women as lead protagonists: An Australian case study of *Stateless* (2020)”. In 2015 Screen Australia's Gender Matters Report highlighted the underrepresentation of women in the screen industry both behind and in front of the screen. In 2020, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media and the University of Southern California were involved in a report which revealed that there were no women over fifty in leading roles in the top 2019 grossing films in France, Germany, UK and the US. Tindale investigates this issue, arguing that older women continue to be underrepresented and stereotyped on screen. The research examines the award-winning Australian television mini-series *Stateless* commissioned and screened by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and acquired by Netflix. This case study applies the author's framework of guiding principles to writing and analysing the portrayal of older women. In doing so, Tindale considers how gender equity can be achieved in films and on screens, to increase diversity and the visibility of women of all ages in culture and society.

Matters around Poetics, Pedagogy, Production and Policy in university film schools are vital discussions to have. This special issue has been a collaborative effort. We thank our blind peer reviewers, the unsung heroes of all academic publications, without your dedication, expertise and generous advice the compilation could not be what it is. We trust you enjoy reading the research published out of the ASPERA Creativity Matters 2022 Conference. We hope you can implement some of the ideas presented in this Journal Special Issue pertaining to these themes impacting our rapidly changing world of screen-based storytelling in your teaching and research.

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