

## Griffith University

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### Critical introduction

This special issue of *TEXT* was proposed in order to address the absence in journal publications of unproduced scripts for either stage or screen. Seven scripts have been included, and each of these is a contemporary intervention in the changing landscape of scriptwriting. This special issue addresses a little of the current political economy that affects that landscape. All seven writers are currently working in higher education and are writing or rewriting scripts of one form or another on a permanent basis. The publication of scripts has traditionally only happened post-production, as a kind of validation of the script's successful production, either for stage or screen. This special issue is a step towards reading these scripts as valued material culture in, and of, themselves.

There is a methodological pluralism at play here, where quantitative research, often extensively historical, is often blended with intensive qualitative inquiry (Elder-Vass 2004). These are all works of the imagination, of course, but an imagination that is filling in the gaps of a story already half-known, in order to reveal something more about that which there is yet more to discover. In the great debate between philosophers and poets, the poet's attempts to disclose will only ever be seen as part of the story.

In each of these scripts, I found myself engaged as a reader in what Heidegger proposed in *On time and being* (1972) as a process of world disclosure, towards a state of something no longer being hidden. For me, as a receptive audience for these scripts, I felt that I experienced something I had not known before, or not known in quite that light. Engaging in script reading in this way became a performative act in itself. As a practitioner of the screenwriting craft, I appreciated the opportunity to read this contemporary collection of scripts and to engage in the imaginative journey of the stories as scripted herein.

Some of the scripts (Batty, Beattie, Joyce) evoke notions of a 'critical realist' (Bhaskar 1978) approach as they address interpretations of events, past and present, whereas others (Baker, Waters, Davis, Hassall) firmly raise more direct questions about memory and representation. All of the works are inspired by lived experiences, lived experiences as recorded in audio-visual archives, memoir, biographies and autobiographies, personal accounts and memory. Even the parody *Frankie goes to Hollywood* (Batty 2013) is based on the experience of a scholar with a set of understandings about the production landscape for reality television.

All of the scripts use an interdisciplinary research methodology, and within this rubric there are three broad themes at play: a questioning of how reality is constructed for the screen/stage (Davis, Batty, Beattie); a questioning of the notion of memory and how to represent it (Joyce, Baker, Hassall); and a questioning how we ourselves can re-present ourselves (Waters, Joyce, Baker).

Baker's screenplay is drawn from the author's own childhood memories. These are recreated 'memory-moments' (Beattie 2008) of when Baker first became aware of his sexuality and gender difference. The script weaves non-fiction and fiction throughout the narrative so that the finished work is neither fully factual nor wholly imagined. Factual research included evidence from the author's childhood diaries, and interviews with family members. The scriptwriting techniques inspired by this research methodology included traditional research techniques (literature review and so forth) and less traditional associative and stream-of-consciousness writing practices. In this way, the script emphasises aspects of the author's internal experience, some of which were non-verbal, including latent feelings.

This work is one of the first creative applications of ideas around the 'mutability' of memory to a screen work that is informed by queer theory. As a deliberately self-reflexive act, the work is innovative in that it applies theories of memory, gender and sexuality from multiple disciplines as part of its methodology. In its having done so, for me as a reader, I am then also engaging in a process of 'disclosure' as in Heidegger's sense of it, in moving towards a state of uncovering what had been hidden.

Waters' *Paul and Ally* (2013) also utilises the fine details of the real and the actual in the form of autobiography as a rhetorical construction within a broader scholarship on identity. On this occasion, the author uses the methodology to explore urban forms of Indigeneity. Many First Nation Australian Aboriginal writers have used auto-ethnography as a form of both creative and academic writing (Heiss 2007, 2012; Watson 1996). Its use stems from both a long history in dealing with personal narratives, but also as part of an approach to overcome a tradition of misrepresentation by non-Indigenous writers (Waters 2013).

Indigenous peoples have only recently begun to qualify the meaning of what constitutes an Indigenous identity within a contemporary context on the screen and on stage. In this regard, *The Sapphires* (2013) and *Redfern now* (2012) have shifted cultural tectonic plates in the current political economy of the screen industry. This process is one that necessarily involves Indigenous and non-Indigenous content creators. In wanting to create an interdisciplinary collegiate mode within academia, Waters developed the term 'autobiographical ethnicity' (Waters 2013). As a descendent of the Kamilaroi Aboriginal First Nation, and also with Spanish and Irish origins, this author draws upon ancestry as both the colonizer and the colonised, both 'Black and consummately white' (Lehman 2004). This practice-led research into autobiographical ethnicity has allowed for a shift in contemporary Indigenous studies and a shift in scriptwriting, as with *Paul and Ally* (Waters 2013).

The research methodology for *The Bounty* (Beattie 2013) drew on Queensland cinema history research by Cunningham (1991) and Molloy (1990). The inspiration for the

screenplay however came from the memoir *My life with Charles* (1973) written by Elsa Chauvel, which recounts the story of the shooting of *In the wake of the Bounty* (1934) which launched the careers of Errol Flynn and the director Charles Chauvel into Hollywood. Beattie's script was also informed by the beautifully illustrated *Charles and Elsa Chauvel* (1989) written by their only daughter Susanne Chauvel-Carlsson.

*The Bounty* is written for a contemporary screen audience and documents Chauvel's commitment to the authenticity of shooting on location. This commitment to location shapes the script's narrative. Chauvel's own stated intention for *In the Wake of The Bounty* (1934) was to 'pull back the veil' on what drew the sailors within the story to mutiny. *The Bounty* (Beattie 2013) retells the journey the filmmakers took across the Pacific by steamer to reach the spot of the 1790 burning of the British frigate *The Bounty*. Once in Tahiti, the Chauvels created a live performance of Tahitian dancers to contextualise the time of 1789 and to 'map out' the construction of that event for an audience. The erotic power of the Tahitians conveyed in the dance scenes provides an important explanatory frame through which to understand this famous eighteenth century colonial contact.

In *Frankie goes to Hollywood*, Batty's earlier scholarly research in the field of reality television (2013) has informed the script. As a meta-commentary on the deep structure of reality television, the creative expression of these arguments becomes a parody of reality television and is situated within a creative space infused by film, television, media and cultural studies. The screenplay discusses how reality television programs are strategically put together: how they are structured, cast, emotionally engineered, and so forth. Academic arguments have been transformed into characters and action, and academic quotations have been transformed into dialogue that reflects a critique of the underlying structures.

*Frankie goes to Hollywood* then presents research-informed ideas in a format that is both innovative (creative theory) and appealing to a wider audience (entertainment, not just critique). Batty's script creatively combines fiction with academic research, for both the overall concept and the nuances of scene writing. *Frankie goes to Hollywood* argues for the creative expression of film, television, media and cultural studies in a form that is relevant to its arguments (i.e., parody). The script is also a highly entertaining black comedy that, apart from its critical intent, is also a strongly engaging narrative.

*Figments of Eliza* (2013) by Davis, re-tells the narrative of one of Queensland's more interesting historical characters. Davis re-imagines the life and times of early settlement figure, Eliza Fraser, after whom the exquisitely beautiful Fraser Island is named. Davis combines extensive documentary research into the life of Eliza Fraser, the empirical and the actual, woven with a fictional imagining of what may have occurred. The script is written in Eliza's imagined voice. Working within this genre of creative nonfiction allowed the writer to transform factually based information into a literary text, in this instance using the stylistic devices of the theatre. This work extends the application of creative non-fiction through the creation of a dramatic script, bringing the voice of the key protagonist alive within a theatrical form, to retell

history. *Figments of Eliza*, a dramatic interlude about place and a specific moment in time, declares itself quite demonstrably to be a retelling of a lived experience from a distinctly female perspective.

The award winning *Salvation* by Hassall also makes a claim for the value of place as central to the theme of historical landscapes, but on this occasion from socio-racial as well as socio-geographic positions. This innovative and experimental work by Hassall plays with the transformation of theoretical discourse on the white inheritance of Australian landscape into a particular form of cultural expression on stage. The script is very clearly anchored to a shared culture, and is designed (its *telos*) in order that it evoke a mimetic act delivered in a shared physical space. The script's performance in a season at the Brisbane Powerhouse in 2012 demonstrates its prior engagement with the public sphere. The script's shortlisting among the top ten finalists of the Queensland Premiers Drama Award in 2011 is testament to its literary value and yet, this is the first publication of the script as a text in its own right.

The script *Afrika ants* (2013) by Hester Joyce and Catherine Joyce also addresses a shared cultural heritage. In this iteration, the writers investigated the application of auto/biographical and screen memoir research to the construction of a multiplatform narrative. The multiplatform approach adds to the script's ability to deal with all three levels of the real, the actual and the empirical (Elder-Vass 2004). This collaborative project centres on the authors travels in Zambia and includes research into archival, family and public footage as well as photographs and magazines from the 1950s to the present day. The research strategy also included audio and visual interviews. This script explores how audio-visual media can be used to help represent the vagaries of memory in recounting stories, and how accounting for the past is inherently completed by collaboration, in this instance by two family members, Hester Joyce and Catherine Joyce. Their stories of the past are shared and locked into memory at screenings of home movies. The vagaries of memory have their gaps filled by an imagination embellished with recorded images and sounds. Here we find a recurring theme of this special issue, the notion of how reality and/or memory is interpreted and represented. Each work seeks to give the narrative an evidentiary status through 'memory-moments' (Beattie 2008), gleaned from varying sources.

It is hoped that this special issue does not remain simply as a pilot issue but becomes a catalyst for more publications like this, of scripts published as texts in themselves, in order to promote discussion about the place of the script in culture and in the academy. We hope to further the discussions started in these scripts on notions of the past, both shared and private, on how to represent (or script) ourselves and our memory; what we remember compared to what our 'betters' might want us to remember (Hobsbawm 1998).

All of these scripts were written as both creative works and as research outputs. Each writer engaged in thinking and writing critically about their creative work and its contribution to research in their field. With these works, the writers are seeking to advance not only the engagement of audiences in contemporary delivery platforms for storytelling, but also their own engagement in creative and critical knowledge or discourse pertinent to their field of enquiry. In this endeavour, all are seeking to

explore the underlying generative mechanisms, events and experiences to the topic or themes of their story. These scripts have all engaged in some form of disclosure or telling to their audiences. They have all sought to present or re-present the narrative “truths” contributing to an overall understanding of things remembered or imagined.

As Plato had it, truth is the concern of the philosopher, not the poet. But as Bhaskar would have it in *Plato etc* (1994) truth can be the concern of the poets. In the sense that Heidegger (1972) proposed the work of the poet, that is, in a process of disclosure, then this special issue has published scripts whose writers have sought to present a newly disclosed point of view. For each of these writers, there was ‘no other way to tell it’ (Paget 1998). I sincerely hope you enjoy these seven variations on contemporary scriptwriting.

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