
RE-CREATING THE ARTEFACT: PRODUCING A LIVING DIGITAL ARCHIVE FOR THE VCA FILM SCHOOL.

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy except where indicated; due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; the thesis is under 50,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, maps, bibliographies, footnotes, references and appendices.

... 

(Signature of candidate)

Filmmaking by its very nature is interdisciplinary and highly collaborative.

I wish to pay tribute and thanks to all the Digital Archive collaborators, listed below, who have assisted either their time, resources or expertise, to help facilitate and envision this project. Without their involvement, this project would not have been possible and instead, these films would remain hidden and inaccessible in the VCA Film and Television archive room.

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project gives something back of practical use to the Film School, its filmmakers and the next generation of filmmakers that pass through its doors as it has done for me.

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ABSTRACT

This practice-led creative research project tells the story of how the author went about producing a digital archive platform, to provide access to a large-scale and growing collection of student short films, belonging to the significant and historic VCA Film and Television department, situated within the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne, Australia.

This dissertation is concerned with showing how the author as a professional staff member and later, an academic for the Film Department, focused on her practice of film producing using practice led, action research and reflexive inquiry to create a digital archive project. The topic of this thesis sits within the burgeoning field of screen production research and explores the discoveries the researcher made from and through researching her own practice. Through reflexive methods, such as journaling and narrative storytelling, the author constructed an embodied representation from the data, tracing her journey of practice as a screen producer and educator. Her concern was providing access to an archive of student short films that dated back to 1966, that were mostly inaccessible to students, staff and researchers. The process evolved into a large-scale digitisation, preservation and access project, whereby the author both developed and realised a 'living' digital archive. This has enabled widespread access to the student film audiovisual archive, that was otherwise inaccessible.

The digital archive holds retrospective film works from VCA Film and Television and continues to grow each year with contemporary student works deposited into its system. In producing this project and examining the process, it extended the author's professional knowledge as a screen practitioner and educator. It also resulted in the development of a 'living' theory; as the researcher embodied the actions of the project and research, new knowledge was created through insight into the researchers practice of screen producing. Thus, this project makes an important contribution to audio visual history in film schools and the field of moving image archives.

The dissertation offers a firsthand, self reflexive account into the practice of film producing and how it can be applied to the development and realisation of a digital archive project to create new audiences and contexts across the nexus of teaching, learning, research and industry

engagement and contribute to the development of practice. This deep insight into the practice of screen producing makes this a significant addition to the field of screen production research.

The creative constituents of the research contain both an online digital archive portal, that stores and preserves over 2,000 student short films dating back to 1966, and an established workflow to enable all current and future born digital works to be digitised and preserved. The films have been carefully curated into genres and are accompanied with rich metadata, offering unprecedented access to staff, students, researchers and the public. The digital archive portal facilitates access and recognition into the discipline of tertiary screen filmmaking and production, by drawing attention to its contribution to the cultural fabric of Australian life and its potential for impact within a national and global context.

ACCOMPANIMENTS TO THE WRITTEN THESIS

The written component of this practice led thesis can be read in addition to accessing and examining the VCA Film and Television Digital Archive Portal, an online portal containing over two thousand student film works that date back to 1966. Throughout this paper, there are screenshots of the archive portal, which should give the reader a solid picture of the project and the archive's functionality. However, to get the full experience, the reader is encouraged to view the digital archive portal and can request access here:

<https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/digital-archive/request-access>.

In addition to the film school digital archive, over one hundred and seventy-five student short films are publicly available on the film school YouTube channel as an accompaniment to the project. To complement the release of these films, twenty-five curated articles were commissioned to curate the collection. University of Melbourne students, staff, researchers, and screen industry members viewed films in the collection and then wrote a creative response to the films, based on themes, personal interests, or social issues.

This written thesis concentrates primarily on the development, production, and release of the digital archive portal. However, reference is made to the curated articles and publicly curated films to highlight the archive's potential to intersect with and attract new audiences and ideas. The digital archive portal can be explored before or after reading the thesis, and the curated articles and films are available for viewing if the examiner desires.

The digital archive portal can be viewed via the following website link and details:

<https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/digital-archive>

Readers must request guest access via:

<https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/digital-archive/request-access>

The curated articles can be accessed via:

<https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/about-us/news/vca-digital-archive-dance>

and the films viewed on the film school's YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkXceh2K46CDbIJA4Ue61Tw>.

Note: Examiners and guests should be issued with a username and password to view the archive in its entirety.

Editorial Note on the Dissertation Constraints

This dissertation is a reflexive journey of producing a digital archive project for a film school, from the point of view of a screen producer/academic, taking on the project of creating a digital archive for a film school. Like producing a feature film, a digital archive project is a large undertaking with many specialist processes and knowledges involved. There exists little to no scholarly knowledge of practically producing a digital archive project for a film school archive, as akin to producing a film within a multi-platform approach. This is despite scholarly acknowledgement that protecting audiovisual archive memory in film schools is important, as evidenced in Chapter Two of my literature review. This thesis is about the breadth of the project, rather than depth and I have chosen to go broad in my analysis, rather than narrow. This research therefore forms part of empirical foundational research into producing a digital archive for a film school. My hope is that the thesis represents a beginning of knowledge construction and transfer for other researchers (producers and filmmaker academics) to develop more detailed accounts in certain areas as relevant to how they might activate a film school archive.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

The etymological meaning behind the word 'archive' is derived from the Greek word 'arkheion: initially a house, a domicile, an address' (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995, 9). This archival project is located at the address of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) Film and Television (FTV) Department, set within the vibrant arts-based precinct of Southbank, Melbourne, Victoria. VCA FTV has a long history, over 50 years, in fact, being Australia's oldest film school¹. It is now nestled within the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, as part of the University of Melbourne, ranked as Australia's number one University.

The film school joined eight other Arts based disciplines at the Faculty: animation, screenwriting, dance, visual art, acting, theatre, music theatre, and production and design. The institution continues to impact its artists' and practitioners' lives and build cultural capacity nationally and globally through its professional development and creative training and programs. The reputational advantage of our moving image archive's home may compel the reader to believe its significance and cultural heritage were inherent from the start. However, this is not so. In fact, as researcher and author of this dissertation, I had to go on a long and winding road to articulate the archive's true value, worth, and research potential before it could become available in its new digital home.

This chapter is designed to introduce the reader to four key elements central to this research project. The first is about articulating the problem that this research addresses. To do this effectively, it is necessary to establish the background of the research set within the film school. Secondly, I discuss the context of the research, namely, why I am concerned with it. Third, I outline my approach to solve the problem, which was practice based, drawing on both action research and filmmaking as a methodology necessary to my practice, producing screen content. The fourth and final section provides an overview of the research project's outcomes, including

¹ VCA Film and Television School structurally shifted into a department in 2017 but can continue to be spoken of as a 'school' here. It belongs to the University of Melbourne, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music.

the key contributions that this research makes to new knowledge and who, therefore, may find value in these findings.

1.1 FINDING THE IDEA: A PROBLEM THAT NEEDED TO BE SOLVED.

As for many action research and film projects, this project's stimulus arose from having identified a problem within a setting and from having 'a good idea.' In this instance, Australia's oldest and most prestigious university based film school, VCA Film and Television held the copyright to fifty years of its student short films, dating back to 1966. The age and prestige of the University and its audiovisual films, forms part of the argument as to the project's need, which will be discussed in the next section. Despite housing this large collection, there were no practical ways for staff, students, and researchers to access or view these works. Films were stored on antiquated, soon to be obsolete, celluloid, and tape based (analogue) magnetic media.²

This project began in 2013, one year after the Science and Technology Council (2012) reissued its seminal paper, "The Digital Dilemma 2: Perspectives from Independent Filmmakers, Documentarians and Nonprofit Audiovisual Archives" firmly re-stating the problems facing the preservation of digital data for the global motion picture industry. Back at home, leading private industry research company, Deloitte (2012), had also released its white paper "Building the Lucky Country Business Imperatives for a Prosperous Australia: Digital Disruption Short Fuse, Big Bang?" asserting digital was the "cornerstone for future value creation."

Inside the walls of VCA Film and Television School, there was a growing expectation from the student filmmaker body that they could not only search for the previous students' works online but that they could host their short films on their own websites or other digital platforms to increase their profile as an emerging filmmaker or storyteller. In late 2013, Apple stopped making its MacBook pro computers with DVD drives, and Blockbuster announced it was closing its DVD stores. Technology was killing the video store, and the need for online access was fast becoming a pressing issue.

² For video, magnetic tape was in use from the mid-1950s. This format is common to audio cassette tapes, VHS videotapes and used in professional contexts and home settings (Corporate Information-Publications, 2020).

One day, as I was making coffee in the staff room and lamenting on the problem of limited access to the student films with another staff member, they presented me with the kernel of a good idea:



"Why don't we just set up
our own YouTube Channel
to feature our student
films?"

The 'we' was an invitation: a good idea for *someone else* to implement. In this case, it was me, and so what began as a 'good idea' quickly turned into a Master's by Research Project. Due to size and scale, it soon transformed into a practice led PhD and a subsequent six year quest to create a digital archive for the film school. The project intended to enable a dormant, near obsolete and hybrid audiovisual collection to become an important teaching, learning, research, and engagement tool and to act as an exemplar in digital archive projects for other film schools worldwide.

My research objectives were to identify the challenges and affordances inherent in creating a digital archive project for pedagogy, research, and engagement. Over time, this evolved into a more reflective analysis of a more tailored research question that related to my practice:

What are the stages and challenges in producing a digital archive project for an audiovisual film school archive to effectively become available and useful for teaching, learning, research, and engagement purposes?

I quickly realised that the project would be best achieved in collaboration with other project partners from the wider University and the industry. Over the years, much effort was spent developing and subsequently creating a large-scale digitisation, preservation, and dissemination archive project to feature this historic student film school collection. It is not possible within this thesis to provide a long and detailed history of the film school and its graduates, many who have contributed to the cultural and social milieu of our national and international artistic and screen landscape. However, it is important to provide some brief and necessary context for the reader to establish the audiovisual archive's provenance, the Film School's ethos, and the richness inherent in this collection.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH: PROJECT SETTING

The VCA Film and Television School (VCA FTV or otherwise referred to as FTV), is highly regarded for producing award-winning filmmakers who have successfully gone on to work in the film and television industry both in Australia and overseas.³ However, VCA FTV started from humble beginnings, as Barbara Paterson explores in her 1996 historical book, *Renegades: Australia's First Film School, from Swinburne to VCA*. Paterson (1996, 1) fondly recounts early film school founder Brian Robinson telling how the film course developed from "fairly spontaneous combustion," which then ignited into a Diploma of Art (Film and Television) at Swinburne Technical College (now Swinburne University), marking it as Australia's inaugural course, established in 1966.

According to Paterson (1996, 47), Robinson was inspired by the University of California, Los Angeles' framework of practice based filmmaking (learning by doing). As Paterson (1996, 49) recalls, "The emphasis on learning by doing was a recognised experimental philosophy practiced at various alternative schools in Melbourne in the 1960s and 1970s." The practice led environment remained central to the film school's success, although the description of its facilities' left something to be desired. Phillip Adams, both a central figure in the resurgence

³ The VCA Film and Television School has launched the careers of numerous acclaimed filmmakers, including Robert Luketic (*Legally Blonde*), David Michod (*Animal Kingdom*), Michael Henry (*Blame*), Justin Kurzel (*Snowtown*, *MacBeth*), Jonathan Auf der Heide (*Van Diemen's Land*), Richard Gray (*Summer Coda*), Gillian Armstrong (*Love, Lust and Lies*) and Oscar Winner, Adam Elliot (*Harvey Krumpet*, *Mary and Max*) and more recently, Ariel Kleiman (*Partisan*), Kitty Green (*Ukraine is Not a Brothel*, *Casting Jon Benet*), Alethea Jones (*Fun, Mom, Dinner*), Polly Staniford (*Berlin Syndrome*, *Lion*).

of the Australian film industry in the 1970s and 1980s and a major influencer in the development of the film course at Swinburne, proudly celebrates the poverty-stricken setting in which the films were made for many years, boasting that: "...the films produced in miserable, gloomy little rat-nest film schools were almost always challenging and innovative." (Paterson 1996, viii). Despite its setting, the film school was firmly located within an international context of screen practice and installed a rigorous selection process to weed out the less qualified candidates. Paterson (1996, 99) goes on to say that: "Philosophically Robinson believed that interesting people would make interesting films and that prosaic people would make dross, as he bluntly put it." Indeed, the films produced at the film school were innovative as described favourably by peers, filmmakers, and industry, who labelled them 'idiosyncratic' and 'crowd pleasers' (1996, 134).

Although Robinson drew on American film school models, the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music is also akin to the Soviet model conservatoire, a teaching style where the staff is led by film practitioners to teach their specialty (Petrie 2011, 3). In the case of VCA FTV, this included writing, directing, producing, and cinematography. In his examination of the media film and education industry and British film conservatoire, Petrie (2011, 4) discusses the formation of the National Film and Television School, set up by Colin Young (former chair of the Theatre Arts at the University of Los Angeles, California (UCLA)). Here, Petrie (5) describes Young's implementation of the 'project system' which he had borrowed from UCLA, stating:

This was essentially a bottom-up approach with the syllabus dictated by the students' creative and technical needs rather than via the imposition of a top-down program of craft training. Such a model is fundamentally geared towards the formation of filmmakers as essentially self-reliant, ideas-driven, cultural producers as opposed to reproducing skilled technicians.

Over time, VCA FTV has evolved and adapted from a project system and conservatoire style model to one situated within a university and therefore governed by academic policies and practices. In this setting, the staff are considered permanent (or ongoing) career academics or former practitioners turned educators, with the aid of professional filmmakers being brought in to teach to honour the film school's original spirit and foundations. Within this institutional setting, I came to be, from an ontological sense. First, as a postgraduate producing student, then as a professional staff member, and later, an academic and researcher. It is here, too, that I have

grown to consider myself a ***cultural producer***, in line with the aspirations of the film school and its founders' inspiration and those they were influenced by.

1.3 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH: WHY AM I CONCERNED?

In this section, I articulate the context of the research and why I am concerned. Firstly, though, as the overall context of this research is situated within a film school, I have located the research project within the field of screen production research, a burgeoning field exploring filmmaking practice. Screen production research is the focus of the 2018 book ***Screen Production Research***, defined by its editors, Craig Batty and Susan Kerrigan (1) as "the study of the creation of audiovisual work that is disseminated on/with screens and can include theory driven practices that use the screen to 'do' research (e.g., research led practice), and systematic reflection upon production to gain rigorous insights into how work is created (e.g., practice led research)."

This thesis acts as a narrative account of how I produced the digital archive - taking a concept (or idea) from development to production and into a market. Here, I am defining the 'market' as our film school, the University, and the public due to the varying platforms that people can use to connect with the archive films. As I worked on this project, I approached it as though I was producing a multi-platform film project, with uniquely defined audiences with distinct requirements and to be exhibited on multiple platforms and screens.

Like filmmaking and its interdisciplinary and highly collaborative structure, this project has intersected with many fields and disciplines, from archives to records, computer and library science, new media, and digital and cultural heritage preservation. However, the roots of this project were realised due to my practice as a screen producer and is thus situated within screen production research. This will be further explored in the section following this and in Chapter Three.

Rewinding slightly; in 2013, I commenced the role of the film school's Screen Production Coordinator. In this role, I administratively coordinated and oversaw the organisational, safety, and legal production compliances necessary to making the student films. Film production compliance involves a set of detailed and complex requirements, involving seeking clearances related to casting, crew, extras, location agreements, music, archival footage, and stills

agreements. Legislative frameworks inherent to occupational health and safety afford another major part in making films, along with setting up safe workplaces and procedures to realise a film safely and practically within its given resources.

The role required me to take on the administration and distribution of short films that attracted commercial sales interest outside of their educational context. A small handful of VCA films produced each year were requested to be licensed for television or online platforms. As I approached students to discuss the distribution opportunities available for their films, conversations revealed that they felt frustrated by not being able to access digital copies of their films easily or screen their films on these online platforms.

The first frustration was to do with the final version of the film students were given to keep. This was an XDCAM high resolution laser based disc, which enabled students to generate digital copies or other versions pending the screening platform. The students were not confident about what to do with the disc, and this became a point of tension (or confusion) for most students. They were handed their final film, which they could not easily access and required further technical training and cost to retrieve their already finished film in a digital file format.

The problem of access extended further. The only way to view the student films was through annual DVD compilations in the faculty library. Works that predated the year 2000 were held on VHS, and these copies were catalogued in the library with basic metadata (year and title only). It seemed clear that students wanted to see their predecessors' work, yet, like me, often did not know what they were looking for. Classic, award-winning, or festival favourite titles were held primarily in the collective memories of graduates or long-term staff members. Unless these memories were tapped for their knowledge, these titles were otherwise discovered through serendipitous means or through word of mouth. Further to this, when screening/distribution requests came my way, the process to create the desired format for the broadcaster or exhibition platform meant the film school's post-production coordinator had to convert the master tape into the requested file format, for example, digitising the Betacam SP magnetic tape via specialised software and machinery into a ProRes file (high resolution digital format). Frankly, there was no simple way to view and access the films digitally.

Once a film is finished, its main source of exposure is through film festival screenings. Films that fail to make a profile find their way onto cupboard shelves or inside desk drawers. Nevertheless, the primary goal for a student filmmaker is to find success through this mode of

exhibition. The film festival provides the launching pad from which early career filmmakers can attract industry attention and connections and make larger, more commercial scale works. With the rise of the digital revolution, those students unable to attract film festival attention were requesting permission to feature their films on personal websites or third-party platforms like Vimeo or YouTube. They desired to showcase their work for family, friends, and those who appeared in the film and highlight their experience to prospective employers.

The second frustration was to do with a long history of the film school owning the films' copyright, which prevented students from digitally releasing their films outside previously negotiated and cleared rights structures with the actors and the film school. For example, actors were only permitted for films to screen in educational contexts and film festivals. In the event of a commercial sale, actors were entitled to be paid a fee based on standard industry union rates for their services. Students, and the school, felt restricted by these processes and the compliance requirements of this union agreement. With the rapidly evolving technological age, these tensions mounted, and it was clear that something needed to be done.

I discovered early in my research that the desire to digitise the student films was not a new one, and project scoping had previously been undertaken, however lack of resourcing and insufficient funds stopped the project from progressing. The film school had a positive profile and a solid reputation for producing talented filmmakers, who became key players in the film, television, and arts industry, both within a local and global context.⁴ Highlighting the early works of filmmakers as a marketing tool was clearly in the film school's interest, yet the films seemed more than just showcase pieces. The unique properties in their metadata (understood as 'data about data') suggested a hidden potentiality behind the moving image collection and an opportunity to enhance teaching, learning, and research.

The moving image has long captured audiences' imagination since its inception toward the end of the 19th century. Its ability to bring stories to life and offer insight into the human condition has contributed enormously to global culture and history. Despite an ever-increasing interest in the moving image study, efforts to preserve film have been completely reliant upon industry methods linked to post-production. These processes have aligned with the film industry's development and exhibition stages (Wengstrom 2013). The digital age has since opened new

⁴ See earlier footnote for a list of significant graduates who have gone on to achieve global acclaim.

possibilities for streaming and exhibiting films on various platforms. The impact of this is still unfolding due to increased threats of piracy, copyright issues, and evolving technologies.

Although we increasingly live in a screen centred world, access to our film heritage is under threat. The reasons for this are several and include format obsolescence, high costs of digitisation; the impermanence of digital environments and platforms; and the need for strong advocacy. The expertise and resourcing of digital archive projects can make them very difficult to attract the requisite funding and support. Without the resourcing and investment, film heritage is at risk of being lost for future generations (Fresa 2014). This thesis supports research findings that state strong digital stewardship and understanding a cultural object's context and significance are necessary to the success of digital preservation efforts (Bearman and Geber 2007; Lazorchak 2011; Beaudoin 2012; Ruthven and Chowdhury 2015).

Thus, it was within these contexts that I began this practice led research project and to explore the idea of digitising, preserving, and disseminating a film school archive – for it to become effectively available and useful for teaching, learning, research, and engagement purposes.

1.4. THE RESEARCH APPROACHES

Making a film requires a nuanced approach that is shaped by the story, available resources and intended audience. As Honthaner (2010, 406) claims in ***The Complete Film Production Handbook:***

Understand that being creative and having a good story is not enough. You need a plan! Before you even start, you will want to make sure there's a market for your film and know how much it's realistically going to cost, where it's going to be filmed, how the film's going to be funded, marketed and sold.

Having a solid plan is indeed the *modus operandi* of a producer and understanding the elements required to produce a film is necessary to effectively achieving a project. This section discusses the long and winding road that I embarked on to produce this project and the methodology that I adopted within it. Throughout this journey, I drew on several lines of inquiry within action research (AR), a methodology used most often in the field of educational research (See Dick 1993; Zuber-Skerrit 1996; Whitehead and McNiff 2006; Greenwood and Levin 2011; Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014).

Zuber-Skerritt (1996, 83) outlines the aims of an AR project, stating the purpose of AR is 'to bring about practical improvement, innovation, change or development of social practice, and the practitioners' better understanding of their practices.' The model is represented in the acronym, known as CRASP (1996, 83):

Critical (and self-critical) collaborative inquiry by
Reflective practitioners being
Accountable and making the results of their inquiry public
Self-evaluation of their practice and engaged in
Participatory problem-solving and continuing professional development.

I had gained my experience in filmmaking (in the field of production and producing) through making and learning by doing (the 'project system'), so it seemed natural to lean into this type of methodology as the project design. AR's collaborative, participatory, critical, and reflective approach, and inbuilt provocations to drive change, suited my practice and personality. My experience has taught me that making good screen work relies on learning and adopting best practice production processes to ensure a project's realisation can be achieved within a given timeframe, budget, and story. I am drawn to narratives that contribute to the social good of this world. As a filmmaker this impulse manifests through working on films that make a difference through attempts to expand an understanding of the human condition. For me, projects within complex social settings that promote discourse and critical thinking to encourage change are difficult to produce, yet perhaps offer the most rewards on a personal level.

As I moved through this action research project's practice and writing, I began to see intersections between politics, archives, education, and film and how they can challenge hegemonic power and pre-existing and current ideologies. Most action research projects start with a political impetus or desire to incite social change and improvement (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014, 17). Early into the research project, contemporary discourse around gender inequality and representation on and behind the screen began to gain traction within the Australian screen industry.⁵ These conversations signalled critical inquiry into

⁵ Refer to Screen Australia funding agency who published two significant reports in 2015 and 2016: (***Screen Australia*** "Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity In Australian TV Drama," accessed 24 August 2016, <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/157b05b4-255a-47b4-bd8b-9f715555fb44/TV-Drama-Diversity.pdf> and

whose stories were being told and by whom and were aligned with much of the discourse I was reading within the field of archival science and records management (Schwartz and Cook 2002; Stoler 2002; Upward and McKemmish 2006; Bastian and Alexander 2009; Gilliland 2014; Upward 2016).

As I proceeded through the cycles of AR using the CRASP model, it became obvious that the goal of creating a digital archive project for a film school and working within a collaborative based model was unrealistic. The pressures and demands inherent to daily institutional life proved to be a significant detractor to this ideal. As I involved numerous individuals and parties along the way, I discovered that I needed to take a central leadership and ownership role. Otherwise, the project would sit at the idea stage only. It was necessary therefore to "produce" the project, and through doing this, I came to understand that alongside the methodological approach of AR, I was drawing on my experiences as a practitioner to realise the project by utilising a film production process methodology (whereby one takes an idea from inception through to completion), per the film value chain model.⁶

During the writing of this thesis, I began to claim a space within the field of screen production (filmmaking) research. When reading *Screen Production Research* (Batty and Kerrigan 2018), I came to understand that AR was a natural extension of my practice and scholarly identity. Within this book, scholar and film practitioner Leo Berkeley discusses the inbuilt reflexive and evaluative methods involved in creative practice and the stages of filmmaking, stating; "This can be an iterative process much like an action research cycle, where regular reflection continually informs and develops subsequent stages of practice" (2018, 43).

Screen Australia "Gender Matters: Women In The Australian Screen Industry," accessed 30 November 2015, <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/f20beab8-81cc-4499-92e9-02afba18c438/Gender-Matters-Women-in-the-Australian-Screen-Industry.pdf>). These reports have spurred several programs to focus on reducing the gender gap and create more opportunities for under represented voices – both in front of and behind the screen.

⁶ The film value chain model considers the process of development, through to finance, production, licensing, and distribution – all phases pertinent to the filmmaking process (see *The International Film Business: A Market Guide Beyond Hollywood* (Finney 2014)).

Berkeley goes on to suggest that:

...the production process should be approached in a mode of inquiry and exploration, where the outcome is uncertain. The reflection on practice should be rigorous and systematic, with the documentation of the process as thorough as possible, ideally incorporating audio-visual as well as text-based means (Berkeley 2018, 43).

In many ways, the digital archive project had a prescribed outcome (involving the digitisation, preservation, and release of the archive films). However, what that would look like and how it would be enacted was unknown and thus forms the basis of this research. Using films within a creative practice methodology is a recognised research process, as affirmed by researcher and filmmaker Catherine Gough-Brady (2019, 2) who talks about using film in her research journey. She says, "By using this methodology, film became more than a thing to be studied it became a partner in the journey of discovery."

Further to the above, and within the field of creative research practice, Redvall (2012, 57) asks: "...how do filmmakers go about creating a new film? How do they settle on the ideas to pursue and what are the stages and challenges in developing an idea into a final film?" This written thesis explores this question concerning a digital archive project, which follows me as a producer, taking a large analogue and celluloid film collection and developing it from concept through to audience. I re-created what was essentially dead media and brought the artefacts (films) to life (screen).

Redvall (2012) further highlights the lack of case studies that discuss the challenges and stages in creative practice (her research is focused on film studies and creative research). Here, Redvall outlines previous studies of the process of production within the American film industry undertaken by Rosten 1941 and Powdermaker 1950 (cited in Redvall 2012, 58); however, Redvall acknowledges that research around the analysis of production processes and a practitioner's choice to take a concept from idea to realisation is somewhat limited (2012, 58). She continues to cite the research of Levine, 2007; Lotz, 2007 and Newcomb, 2007, stating that:

Newcomb has argued for what he terms 'synthetic media industry research,' comparing media work with a dance, where one has to focus on 'movement, fluidity, and choices, both strategic and tactical, in any situation,' since the processes are marked by

'constantly shifting involvement and engagement of individuals and groups who are always exceptionally aware of both the structures in which they work and the degrees of agency they hold' (2009: 269) (Redvall 2012, 59).

These sentiments affirm that gaining insight into my choices as a practitioner concerning contemporary practices of film production processes has positioned me as a cultural and active insider who led the project in a similar way to a producer leading a film. These findings are significant to the value of archives and screen practice, acknowledging that the agency of the archivist and the agency of the screen producer change with the advent of digital production and technology, shifting the roles within given contexts and from multiple vantage points. This change in agency is due to records, films and cultural objects retaining new context (through audience engagement) as they become available digitally. The archivist and screen producer may ask similar questions; what is worth preserving, what story is worth telling, by whom and why? Through filmmaking production and AR, answers were found to the research question exploring the stages and challenges in producing a digital archive project for an audiovisual film school archive to effectively become available and useful for teaching, learning, research, and engagement purposes.

In Chapter Two, I explore my own discovery journey through a conceptual framework that became a meta construct housing the research process. To further deepen the research and my creative practice, I explored the digital archive project from a phenomenological and rhizomatic point of view. A rhizome is a botanical term used to describe a stem that shoots out roots from its nodes. It has been used as a philosophical concept by Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 7). To them, "A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles." Further to this, Coyne (2013, 3) describes a rhizomatic system as "dynamic and unresolved, growing and anarchic, in the manner of a rich and open-ended conversation." I connected this thinking to the archive, in which conversations about past, present, and future can grow and intersect through open-ended research possibilities that were yet to be discovered.

Here, I also linked the concepts of 'body as archive' and 'archive as body' (terms relevant to dance and performance literature) to the research project, to house what otherwise could appear as disparate activities in such a large and complex project. I did this by inserting myself as a researcher into the body of research and moving image works that I was providing access to, thereby giving a centralised location point.

Over time, I realised that the films and their stories, characters, people, settings, themes, and the technical, creative elements continued to live on, taking new form and shape for present-day audiences. The contemporary engagement with the films would allow for a new telling of their stories. The archive was to be resurrected, becoming an embodied site of knowledge, continually transforming and finding new meaning. An inherent aim was to breathe new life into an unused and dying collection, a body of work(s) that had gone cold, been left behind, waiting to disintegrate in the magnetic mortuary and cavern of celluloid.

My analysis of this came through notes, observations, records of meetings and emails, article writing, and an online journal, which enabled me to construct an iterative reflexive approach to inform the practice-led research. The results of this suggest that the same elements that underpin the filmmaking production process - establishing the project vision, drawing on collaboration, teamwork and communication principles, analysing project risks, understanding audience, platform, and project need/context (its significance) – can all be applied to the development and implementation of a digital archive project.

These requirements can be considered by other cultural and educational institutions looking to embark on a project like this. It also opens possibilities for filmmakers, artists, and historians to insert themselves into the digitisation of a "work" to create a holistic, personal, engaged, and reflexive strategy that expands existing archives' notions and reconsider them as generative and alive. A digital archive project (normally viewed as resource heavy) can become more viable through applying a rhizomatic framework of thinking. This may encourage more sustainable, innovative, imaginative, and participatory approaches between the artist and the work. By creating work within and alongside a digital archive project, a process of co-creation can occur in symbiosis. Not only are the materials in the archive transformed, but so too are the people involved in leading these projects.

The theoretical concept of the 'living archive' and my interest in archive as body/ body as archive (explained in chapter two) became central to maintaining my interest in the project. I came across the term 'living archive' concerning the Circus Oz' Living Archive' project (2010-2014). This large research project is investigated in *Performing Digital: Multiple Perspectives on a Living Archive* (Carlin and Vaughan 2016). This book explores a wide range of perspectives on the notion of what constitutes a living archive. The project appealed to me because it aimed to:

...test and evaluate how the development and deployment of a rich media archive may catalyse the creative participation of diverse users – Circus Oz, peers, fans, scholars and the general public – in building a prototype 'living archive,' that becomes a shared online space for creative dialogue on the history and artistic future of Circus Oz, providing a new model of digital engagement for the performing arts (*Circus Oz and Video*, "The Project," accessed 1 July 2020, http://www.circusarchive.net/blog/?page_id=2).

This project served as initial inspiration in developing the digital archive project and notably influenced me in considering this project as a living archive. As I began to learn more about the nature of digital preservation and its inherent need for responsiveness and action due to rapidly evolving technological processes and changes in systems, my research inverted. I began to reflect on my own personal approach to my practice of producing, education and change. According to performer and ethnologist Tomie Hahn (2006, 89):

Reflexivity in action moves beyond the mere appearance of self-reference in text. In acknowledging one's presence in the field, reflexivity can emerge as a theoretical stance that critiques the researcher's relationship, identity, and community members she studies.

As I took the necessary steps to create the project, and as I began to insert aspects of my personal history and story into the project, I, too, was re-created in the process. Through the writing of this thesis, I discovered that my experience as a producing practitioner meant that in the process of producing films, I had been implicitly applying an ontological and epistemological worldview, constructing my knowledge and beliefs through the process of making. During the critical analysis of the process of re-creating the films in the archive, a convergence of theory and practice began to take place, drawing deeper links between the academy and screen industry. This was through recognising my way of being (how I thought of and viewed the world) as a reflective practitioner, an educator, and a citizen of the world. The danger in not doing this in such an interdisciplinary project would be to privilege more academic forms of knowledge. In locating knowledge within the domain of practice, I avoided either negating or trivialising important praxis led knowledge.

Finally, by combining these approaches and working towards creating this 'living archive,' my research culminated in developing a personal 'living theory,' which is a term central to the thinking of Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead (2006). This research journey has influenced my approach to producing and pedagogy and viewing organisational and personal change. It has given purpose to my life and practice through personal, professional, and educational growth.

1.5 OUTCOMES AND CONTRIBUTION TO NEW KNOWLEDGE

In this section, I describe the key contributions of this research to knowledge and outline the impact the archive has had on its audiences, including myself as a researcher. I describe the various aspects of the new work that serves to advance an understanding of the importance of film school audiovisual archives and the practice of screen producing. Firstly, there is almost no scholarly research into practically producing a digital archive for a film school. This is despite researchers acknowledging that audiovisual memory in film schools is missing and is an important contributor to our moving image history. The significance of this is highlighted in *ENS Louis-Lumiere's* international journal issue devoted to the memory of film schools (Levy 2015). This text is a primary source in which to justify this research as it demonstrates that the study of student films is becoming a more recognised and practiced phenomenon. The journal issue highlights the importance of engaging with audiovisual moving image history in film schools through its scholarly analysis. The combined approach to my research reveals that the value of a digital archive for a film school is not only important for teaching, learning and engagement, but for the historical and contemporary research into cultural memory.

For the staff and students at The Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, VCA Film and Television, and The University of Melbourne, there is now available a digital archive containing a retrospective collection of graduate films dating back to 1966. This is a workflow pipeline allowing all contemporary born digital films to be stored, retrieved, and curated. Born digital refers to films that are produced digitally and finished in a digital version. This means that every film now produced at the film school (including production exercises, semester one and two films for non-graduate levels, across all streams – narrative, documentary, and animation at both undergraduate and graduate level) can be captured in the archive, making these works accessible in ways that have never been possible.

Each film has standardised and specialised filmographic metadata. For the first time in the film school's history, students can enter the metadata related to their films, upload still images, press kits, production notes, directors' statements, and download a high resolution exhibition format copy of their film and a web access copy for future use. Staff and students can also search films in the archive based on specific film related metadata and curated playlists. The archive is available via a University supported digital repository, designed with a contemporary and bespoke interface to best represent a film school collection and its needs. The data model has been constructed so that relationships are key to its mapping, and it offers the potential for geo mapping and other forms of innovative data mining for future researchers.

The implementation and access to student films has strengthened the cultural heritage and moving image history of the film school, Faculty, University, and the filmmaking scene in Melbourne, Australia as will be evidenced throughout this thesis. It has ensured that these student films are searchable, discoverable, and playable in Australia and for audiences globally. The project's deeply collaborative and interdisciplinary nature has seen it generate opportunities for staff, film students, archivists, researchers, and the industry to engage with the film collection in the development and production phase, right through to its implementation and release. This has been realised in the metadata writing, digitisation, project guidelines, sorting through the collection, and creatively curating the films. In 2019, this work culminated in a public exhibition and the launch of the digital archive. Since then, students and staff have led film festivals and University public facing exhibitions. New requests to exhibit and research the collection continue to appear as the digital archive gains further traction.

The digital archive has positively impacted students' lives because it demonstrates an inherent value through its very creation, influencing the perceptions and behaviours of film students, staff, and the wider industry in thinking about their filmmaking practice and its value within pedagogy, research, and cultural engagement. I lay claim to the digital archive project making a significant contribution to Australian audiovisual cultural life because it has contributed to institutional and public debate around the need for film preservation. Through the digitisation of student films and their subsequent access, I believe the project has achieved the impact that Kerrigan and Callaghan (2018) distinguish as central to filmmaking research. Here, they state, "The impact narrative provides evidence of critical reception, social impact and a sense of belonging" (2018, 236). Throughout the stages of the project this was evidenced and will be further explored in each stage of this thesis. The project shifted the perception of these films as

educational exercises, into central records of our daily life that were a valid part of the moving image canon.

By enacting and then examining and reflecting on the project, I also came to value my practice as a screen producer. I saw that I had re-created these artefacts and transformed *dead* material into *living* material, affording it new value and significance. This process transformed my practice, as I could gain a deep insight into how I arrived at key decision making, the ease and influence of my decision making, and how this impacted the consequences and creation of the project (Kerrigan and Callaghan 2018, 236).

I commenced this journey as an employed worker and a practitioner, coming from a solid grounding in film production. The research has since evolved into a major contribution to screen production research, audiovisual archival management, decision-making frameworks, and integrative platform development to digitise, preserve and provide access to a large collection of audiovisual and ancillary materials, along with an articulation of my scholarly identity.

Through this journey, I discovered my experience of the producer's role aligned with Karen Gracy's findings that the archivist can be seen as a gatekeeper, cultural driver, and knowledge co-creator (2013, 365). New knowledge has been created in the practice of producing screen works and in the valuing of student film making within the canon of moving image history. The producer's multifaceted role is highlighted, offering new ways to view and value the screen producer's role as a cultural agent who works within a continuum of collaboration and within a filmmaking eco-system. This may serve to give deeper meaning to moving image archives in terms of why they should exist.

This is in many ways like conversations occurring within the fields of archives and records, which discuss continuums within records. The records continuum model (RCM) is an abstract conceptual model, developed in Australia as a model of recordkeeping practice. It evolves within and through the dynamics and complexities of space-time, moving across the axes of dimensions known as creation, capture, organisation and pluralisation (making the records available) (McKemmish 1997; 2001; Upward and McKemmish 2006; Upward 2016). These axes show the "different facets of accountability: the identity of the entity involved in a transaction documented by the records, what that entity did, what the records provide evidence of, and how the records are found and retrieved for later use" (In the Dictionary of

Archives Terminology, Society of American Archivists. "Records Continuum." Accessed December 10, 2016. <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/records-continuum.html>. This definition goes on to say that the axes show the "different facets of accountability: the identity of the entity involved in a transaction documented by the records, what that entity did, what the records provide evidence of, and how the records are found and retrieved for later use." The RCM model views records as "processes of becoming" (McKemmish 2001) and part of a continuum of action, known or unknown, that change in context and form part of a broader socio-political, cultural and historical systems and processes within managing archives (Upward 2005).

I have come to see throughout this research that filmmaking can be seen as a dialogue between theory and practice. This suggests filmmaking as a process is generative and part of an evolving culture within moving image praxis.⁷ It also argues for archives to become part of the filmmaking process, whereby a solid plan for archiving is seen as part of planning in the preproduction, production and postproduction of films.

My research recreated the artefacts in the archive and recreated me as a practitioner, researcher, and academic as I came to value my practice in new ways. This transformation of a process and my practice has given back to the film school, the students I teach, the faculty, and the wider University. As I have begun to incorporate the knowledge learnt from producing the digital archive into my scholarly identity, my beliefs have aligned with Jacques Derrida, who deduces that as much as an archive is an illumination of the past, it should bring into question 'the coming of the future' (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995, 26). During this research journey, I discovered the archive as a space of encounter, whereby I experienced memories of my early filmmaking days and how my childhood experiences had shaped me. I also began to experience a new outlook on the value of these past experiences, including how I produced screen works. These insights have informed how I critically engage with my practice. My hope is that now the materials in the archive are digitally accessible to staff, students, researchers, and the public, then others can encounter the digital archive too, to illuminate the past and call into question the future.

⁷ This fits in with Barbara Reed's notion (2005) of the records continuum model as a way of engendering multiple readings and plurality of interpretations.

Finally, this research offers insight into me as a practitioner and my choices related to contemporary film production processes, using an action research approach and filmmaking methodology, taking an idea from concept to audience. The project resulted in a functional, interactive digital archive and the reframing and re-contextualisation of previously created screen based works for multiple points of linkage. This has enabled divergent pathways for these short films to effectively reach contemporary audiences.

CHAPTER TWO: WHEN PRACTICE MET THEORY: MODES OF ASSEMBLAGE.

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter established the context of the project, including situating the work within the field of screen production research and locating the project's significance at its home within the VCA Film School. This chapter identifies and reviews important literature pertaining to several fields influential in the development and implementation of the digital archive project. It also examines the theoretical and practical elements I drew on to construct this interdisciplinary digital archive project and how I used these to motivate and frame the project design. I use the findings of prior research studies and phenomenological thinking as a stimulus to arrive at a conceptual framework in which to consider the digital archive project.

Facilitating this project's interdisciplinary nature is akin to the complex and multifaceted role of the screen producer. The producer must familiarise themselves with and work within various fields, disciplines, and frameworks, from legal to copyright, finance, and business, through technical and aesthetic operations and finally, marketing and distribution. The producer need not be an expert in these areas but should possess a clear and thorough understanding of how these parts operate and assemble to realise a writer/director's vision. As an experienced screen producer, it was, therefore, not a giant conceptual leap to take on and drive a project that involved working through a knowledge web of fields and discourses, in this case, that related to archival science. These included working within records management, information management, technology, computer science, digital and cultural heritage, and film preservation. Given the complex interdisciplinary nature of this project I referenced a vast body of disciplinary knowledge and examined the decisions, methodologies, and findings of other relevant studies. These may influence the project decisions of researchers when considering preserving, digitising, and providing access to their own film school collections.

From the early stages of the project's inception, my practice drove this project and research. Dialoguing with theory was hindered by the need to "do" the work, partly due to the project's large-scale nature and partly due to a struggle to find my academic voice throughout the research. I felt the most comfortable in the phases of planning and doing (and, of these phases, there were many to keep me occupied!). Although reflexivity has been the most rewarding

part of this project, it has also been challenging to embrace. This digital archive project has been a complex, multidimensional, and demanding process, and the writing of this dissertation has followed a similar pattern. My background as a producer has been influential in this project's realisation, although I was not particularly conscious of this at the time. Throughout this dissertation writing, I began to develop a greater awareness of my ontological and epistemological stance to understand how I arrived at this project and how I created new knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to offer the reader some personal background, moving the discussion beyond the previous chapter into how my early interests connected me to this project.

2.1 CONNECTING FRAGMENTS OF MY PAST

From an early age, I held an interest in the moving image and the creative arts. My mother enrolled me into drama classes when I was seven years old. For ten years, I developed skills in improvisation, play and building character. Creative practice fuelled a curiosity for life that was otherwise dormant in my suburban and troubled home life experience. I started making films at the age of 17, fascinated by the cinema and its power to evoke feelings of excitement and passion. I was not particularly crafty, clever, or perhaps any good. I just liked to organise things and bring people together to construct creative scenarios. Later, I was to recover repressed memories of sexual abuse in my childhood and discovered that my process of making was as much to do with me trying to (re)construct a sense of self, as it was with creating stories and situations. At a very young age, severe emotional, sexual, and psychological abuse tore apart my identity. I have been trying to (re)construct it ever since. It has taken me many years to come to terms with the notion of untangling thoughts and ideas. To be able to 'listen' to myself, without fear of experiencing overwhelm and terror, I have had to build layers of emotional resourcing to feel psychologically and emotionally safe.

After an early foray into filmmaking, through a diploma in film and television in 1998 and subsequent industry work in production on funded short films, a feature film, telemovie, and television commercials, in 2003, I decided to go to university to get an undergraduate degree. This decision was borne out of a desire to become more critically aware and engaged with the process of filmmaking and storytelling. I wanted to find out what I wanted to say; how I could contribute to the world. I wanted to stop running away from myself and focus on using my voice to find out who I was. It was no surprise then when I combined my early interests in

drama with filmmaking and entered an undergraduate arts degree, majoring in performance studies.

At the risk of diverting the reader from the focus of the research, this degree was life-changing, and the principles of performance studies served to influence my interest in the embodiment of theory and practice. As an interdisciplinary field of research, performance studies draws from the social sciences, humanities, and the arts to connect the idea of performance as an element of practice that enacts culture. Jon McKenzie (2005) suggests this culminates in performance becoming "the presentation or "reactualisation" of symbolic systems through both living and mediated bodies." My initial foray into the areas of phenomenology, feminism, and postmodernism was superficial yet invoked a curiosity about the nature of an embodied practice, an essential paradigm to studying this field (McKenzie 2005).

After this degree, I returned to filmmaking to study for a Postgraduate Diploma in Producing at VCA Film and Television, where this project is set. I had long wanted to study at the prestigious VCA, so it was a dream come true when I was offered a place. It was the summer of 2006 before I started film school that my first memories of abuse emerged, and this postgraduate year was marked by debilitating symptoms of Complex PTSD, mixed in with transformative learning experiences that kept me turning up each day with a pursuit of purpose. I began to shape a professional identity as an early career producer while privately trying to piece together fragments of my past in the hope of constructing an inward identity to match an external assurance. It was a painful time, but my time at VCA was rich and experiential, affording me a firm grounding into the film school's nature and practice and the wider industry. It also connected me to the student film material that I was later to reconceptualise within the digital archive.

After film school, I worked on many productions in the industry, as a producer, and in associated production roles, further sharpening my production management skills and experience, both in a supportive and leadership capacity. By the mid to late 2000s, I recognised that digital technology was transforming the film and television industry, and it was important to gain skills quickly in this area.

The rise of digital technology was opening new possibilities and ways of operating for producers, filmmakers, organisations, and institutions. Former Head of Business and Audience

at Screen Australia, Richard Harris, stated firmly in his report, *Film in the Age of Digital Distribution* (2007, 26):

It is no longer necessary to pass through the gatekeepers to get to a screen; audiences can be accessed directly. This means that filmmakers no longer have always to be 'hit-dominated' and looking for a mass audience, but instead can seek out niche audiences.

A key and central driver for this project was accessibility. The tools for this accessibility have been recognised within the screen industry for some time now, with new technologies driving equipment and postproduction processes. Yet the digital links to accessibility, which was central to my project have been less discussed. This is evidenced by Ryan et al. (2014, 125) in *Beyond the Bottom Line: The Producer in Film and Television Studies* (Spicer et al. 2014), who seven years after Harris' report, were examining how digitisation, digital technology, and media convergence were transforming the role of the screen producer. They discuss the transitory nature of the producer role in terms of the study and practice of its craft, stating that its function:

... is also found on a continuum across film, television, advertising, corporate video and the burgeoning digital media sector. In recent years, fundamental changes to distribution and consumption practices and technologies should have had a correlate impact on screen production practices and on the role of existing screen producers.

A direct example of this manifested in my own career development trajectory when I decided to upskill and undertook an online course in digital marketing. I was cognisant of the changing landscape and that I needed to learn how to create digital content through platforms like YouTube and blogging. I began to work for local businesses, producing digital marketing content to help them rank higher in search optimisation for relevant keywords about their business online. My hunch to upskill later served as part of the inspiration for the digital archive.

At the same time, I produced low budget content for international television networks, whereby I was combining archival footage from news feed sites into packaged television shows ranging from subjects to do with celebrities, sports stars, zoo animals, and the environment. Sourcing this archival material, repurposing it, editing and contextualising the raw footage were all part

of the professional requirements within individual productions. Therefore, I understood how to recontextualise archival footage for new modes of discovery and access.

A final aspect of my background, essential to this project's realisation, was my completion of a postgraduate diploma in education in 2012. This study spurred a passionate interest in pedagogy that has contributed greatly to developing a "living educational theory" (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). I began to view education as transformative and holistic – considering the 'whole self.' As I have started to assemble all the parts of my background to form a picture of my ontological self (how I came to be), I have discovered a great need to promote change (within, for, and around me). I believe this is premised on discovering my early trauma, which created a fervent desire to reassemble a sense of self to transform it from an identity rooted in shame and the negative effects of abuse into one of post-traumatic growth and positive recovery.

Therefore, the parts of this research that are the most self reflexive are driven by a feminist and phenomenological investigation into the body as archive / archive as body and how these ideas feed into the "living archive" (Carlin and Vaughan 2016) and my "living educational theory" (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). This has become a symbolic act designed to unlock my own trauma, which has continued to impact my life significantly. As I rebirthed the dormant audiovisual materials belonging to the film school, metaphorically, the same process happened to me. The once hidden stories within the archive of my mind and body were awakened. I began to reconstruct myself into a new life narrative, moving from a loss of self and shame into a post-traumatic identity that was instead rooted in growth, empowerment, and discovery.

This project has been, in many ways, the emancipation of a film school archive collection and emancipation of myself. However, it did not start that way; rather, it commenced more strategically and pragmatically involving an analysis of what other film schools were doing with their historic student short films. This revealed a surprising absence of student short films in moving image history, along with a looming threat to the preservation of audiovisual history in general.

2.2 THE FILM PRESERVATION AND AUDIOVISUAL LANDSCAPE FOR FILM SCHOOLS

Short filmmaking is an important part of a filmmaker's journey. The skills gained in thinking through making and learning through doing, function as an effective testing ground in which to work with mise-en-scene to craft a story to connect to its intended audience. Beyond educational exercises, short films can become calling cards for filmmakers hoping to access larger pools of money and resourcing to support their longer form film productions. Student film work is often unpolished, unrefined, yet characterised by a subtle authenticity as its maker builds ideas around explorations of consciousness, diverse themes, personal experiences, relationships and interior character worlds - rather than those with a specifically commercial agenda.

On the contrary, short films can be considered 'ugly babies', a term affectionately used by archivist Snowden Becker (2010, 5) to describe the form. Becker says that these *babies* "are sometimes even disowned by creators who go on to achieve mainstream success (5)." The main exhibition outlet to screen short films are one of the many thousands of short film festivals around the world. The filmmaker's goal is to cut through the plethora of submissions to ultimately premiere at a significant international or national film festival. Which festival your film gets into acts as an indicator to the industry as to the measure of your success. Once a film has toured the film festival circuit (with a lifespan of two years), it generally finds its home on the filmmaker's website or, nowadays, Vimeo or YouTube. What then is the interest of student films, beyond being a training exercise or measure of achievement for the filmmaker and its creators? Each year, film programs within creative arts institutions amass hundreds of short films from its graduates. They materialise as time capsules of how film students have constructed reality outside of the pressures of a commercial imperative.

This very subject of audiovisual archives and memory in film schools became the focal point of a journal publication belonging to the famous and historic French Film School, École Nationale Supérieure Louis-Lumière (**ENS Louis-Lumière**). In 2015, the film school published an edition titled; 'Audio-Visual Archives and Memory in Schools.' This focused squarely on the increasing debate surrounding film preservation due to the proliferation of digital platforms offering open access to collections. The publication attracted several submissions from film schools around the world, who discussed the significant archives of student works in their holdings. This edition became an important reference for this thesis (and is drawn on heavily in this section of the thesis), as it was one of the very few pieces of literature

that directly considered the historical, social and cultural significance of student films and their potential for research.

In **ENS Louis-Lumière's** 'Audio-Visual Archives and Memory in Schools,' film school archives were revered for being more than commemorations of their successful alumni. Instead, student films were positioned as cultural records and historical artefacts, offering insight into the cultural milieu of youth, evolving and changing over decades (Denoyelle et al. 2015). According to Barwell (2015, 14), a contributor to the **ENS Louis-Lumière 2015** edition; "The memory of a film school resides not only in the archive, but also in the people. Not only in the world produced, but also in the provocations and exercises that are set." Film schools often teach cinematic history to help guide a student's understanding of past movements for their own innovation and change. Locating one's artistic practice within a canon is important to transforming past ideas and creating acts of differentiation. Barwell (2015, 14) believes that students who lack an historical and contextual grounding can create work that "becomes self-referential and shallow." As a film school educator, I have observed that students often feel like they are making a film that has never been made before, yet the story plays out with many clichés and tropes that I have seen in other film students work. In Barwell's words:

The primary function of a film school must be to challenge the 'now' of contemporary media and expose our students to the journey of filmmaking over the past 120 years. It must be to encourage them to challenge the dominant modes of representation with a critical, informed intelligence, to encourage diversity and to work with moving image in ways that we cannot yet imagine (2015, 14).

Therefore, to draw on student films as examples of practice can be seen as an important part of showing work outside the wider canon of cinema, as it encourages students to reflect critically on works that are made on a more level playing field, rather than unfairly comparing themselves to work produced with greater resourcing, including budgets, personnel, and marquee talent.

Other film schools mentioned in the **ENS Louis-Lumière 2015 journal edition** included the federally funded Australian Film and Television Radio School in Sydney, who has long recognised the value of its student films and its contribution to cultural heritage in Australia and beyond. This acknowledgement has even been embedded into its Records Management

Policy, which establishes the archive as having heritage value. According to Astore and Browne (2015, 60):

Heritage then emerges as the *raison d'être* of AFTRS' archive. Here 'archive' can be understood as the beginning of an ongoing story, of a lived history, and of an evolving organism that reinvents itself at every turn. Any archive is more than the possession and storage of documents, objects, or audio-visual material in environmentally controlled vaults. It is a process whereby objects exist as historical artefacts nascent with the potential to delineate moments in time as cultural markers.

Like AFTRS, VCA holds the copyright to its student films and retains master and backup copies of the films, along with text based archival documents, related to the making of the film, which includes a film's chain of title.⁸ The difference is that AFTRS has taken an active stance in terms of ensuring clear policy alignment and strategy necessary to safeguarding and respecting the historical and cultural potential of past and future narratives to enliven the film school and its filmmakers. The framework inherent within this AFTRS policy is duly linked to it being a federally supported institution, influencing its staffing levels and overall institutional resourcing.

When the AFTRS Library was embarking on its own digitisation project in 2005, the VCA was not yet even an affiliated college of the University of Melbourne, standing alone in terms of its operational procedures and financial structure. The obligations that come with the AFTRS having Commonwealth statutory support means that alongside the National Archives, these institutions are required to ensure that the records and information they are custodian of, are properly managed and preserved. Here, preservation is seen as a "dynamic process" described by Astore and Browne (2015, 62) and is how AFTRS traces the lineage of its makers:

This is evident through the fact that student films made by notable AFTRS alumni are still requested on the festival circuit and are highly sought after for distribution licences, particularly since some alumni have evolved from gifted students to world renowned filmmakers (2015, 62).

⁸ Chain of title is a legal term that refers to all the legal agreements and documents that relate to the ownership and rights of the film. These must be cleared and secured so that a film can be released and distributed. Agreements can include, but are not limited to, writer and director agreements, crew and cast agreements, location, music, archival and stills agreements.

The AFTRS digitisation project, titled *Vision Bytes*, oversaw the digitisation (not preservation)⁹ of student films from 1973 to 2009. The films were made available as MPEG4 format files, commonly used for streaming on the internet. The short films were streamed from both the Library site and the film school's homepage. Their showcase of films proved to be an impressive benchmark for the VCA digital archive project. A key difference however in the VCA FTV digital archive project is that the AFTRS site lacks detailed metadata and an ability to curate and contextualise the films. As the digital archive project evolved, the multimodal potential of the films and their metadata revealed itself. The research potential and value of the archive became clearer as I developed the project. I began to see that through making the films available with rich metadata, the VCA archive would stand apart from other digitisation projects within Australia and arguably the international film school arena.

ENS Louis Lumière's journal edition 'Audio-Visual Archives and Memory in Schools' (2015) also focused on other institutional archival projects and their significance, although many were theoretical analyses of current processes, rather than practical case studies in digitisation, preservation and dissemination. For example, the Sydney Film School revealed it had in place a standardised cataloguing system to ensure its student films were accessible on its website. According to the Film School's Artistic Director, Ben Ferris (2015, 44); "Film titles can be easily identified on the website, either by the name of the graduate filmmaker, listed alphabetically, or by the title of the film, also listed alphabetically." Despite Sydney Film School's ease of access to information around its films, Ferris challenges the idea of having neatly fashioned and standardised metadata. His influences are spurred on by the eccentric styles and ideas of late French New Wave Filmmaker, Chris Marker. Ferris (2015, 47) suggests that:

It will be tempting for any collector/curator of the above films to avoid such "antagonisms" by seeking out safe modes of categorization, the most obvious example being by the form (documentary, animation, drama, etc) in which they are expressed. However, in constructing a cross-referential archive, we must be careful to resist our

⁹ Digitisation is different from digital preservation. To digitise means to create digital replication copies for access purposes. To digitally preserve a film, means creating an open-ended source format file, such as JPEG2000, which is cited by experts as being the new archival format for digital works (*Digital Preservation Coalition*, "Digital Preservation," accessed 10 January 2020, <https://www.dpconline.org/digipres>).

impulse towards simplification and segregation, thereby diminishing the potential for discordance and meaningful debate.

It is important to state that these assertions by Ferris were primarily driven by his desire to foreground the multi contextual nature of the Sydney Film School archives and the diversity of filmmakers within it. However, the benefits of standardised and rigorous metadata enable future researchers to work with designers to create interfaces that may reflect some of the experimental and innovative ideas that Ferris discusses in his article. This is well understood by archivists and forms the basis for curatorial and archival science disciplines. In drawing on these disciplines and attempting to locate them within the need to curate a film school collection, it became clear that before any experimentation or innovation can take place, basic archival principles need to be secured. Ferris (2015, 48) proposes that:

As generators of large volumes of content from all around the world, film schools could play a significant role in the threading together of the thousands of “fragments of memory” belonging to individual voices from different cultural backgrounds. Through a collective exchange of ideas, images and signs – Markers “continents, islands, deserts” – film schools can help chart the landscapes of our past and perhaps, by doing so, the contours of our future.

Viewing the short films in the VCA archive as memory fragments, opened the project’s possibilities, helping me to reimagine the past and influence conversations of the present and future. However, despite these imaginings, the need for archival rigour and standardised metadata was imperative. This would allow for content to be pieced together in dynamic ways.

Another example of an archive project explored in **ENS Louis Lumière’s** ‘Audio-Visual Archives and Memory in Schools’ 2015 journal edition, focused on Germany’s oldest film University, Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF (UBKW). UBKW boasts a rich student film heritage, as its inception dates to 1954. The archive currently contains over 4,000 films from six decades of its school history (Brombach, Ebbrecht and Wahl 2015, 79). Like the VCA archive, UBKW’s collection holds film exercises from first year students, along with the graduation projects, thus offering a deep insight into its history and practices of filmmaking. It was not until after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, that the value of their archive became a talking point. The films in the archive underwent a process of systematic cataloguing so that

films could be searchable and used in multiple contexts. Brombach, Ebbrecht, and Wahl (2015, 81) tells us that:

From the perspective of historical documentary films and TV documentaries, the school's films and footage were now called "material fragments" and they were viewed as documents about life in the GDR. In some cases, these films were also starting points in the cinematic search for historical connections.

Despite the overt significance of this archive, it appears that the films and historical documents belonging to this film school remain only as analogue copies and only accessible via institutional research. This appears to present an opportunity for a public collection of this kind, as a historical and cultural audiovisual museum of filmmaking practice. Brombach, Ebbrecht, and Wahl (2015, 84) state that UBKW is currently focused on transitioning from analogue to digital storage, so it will be interesting to see how the film school curates its films, if at all, to exhibit the richness of its collection. Interestingly, UBKW recognises the need for ensuring a digital legacy of its collection and has made the subject of archiving a compulsory part of their media technology course for all film students, irrespective of their major.

Finally, in my survey of this rich discussions around audiovisual archives in film schools (as evident through the **ENS Louis Lumière** journal), scholars appeared to acknowledge the diversity intrinsic in the work of student films by student filmmakers (Wilson 2011; Becker 2010; Ferris 2015). Yet, contemporary research shows a lack of effective translation of these diverse voices moving from film school into industry, in terms of who ends up in working in front of or behind the screens. This is evidenced in 2015 and 2016, when the federal screen funding agency, Screen Australia published two reports interrogating who was behind the telling of Australian stories.¹⁰ This screen research revealed the underrepresentation of women and people of colour on screen and behind the camera, along with a homogenised view of sexuality and lack of representation for people living with a disability. In her 2010 presentation, moving image archivist Snowden Becker declared:

¹⁰ Refer to *Screen Australia* "Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity In Australian TV Drama," accessed 24 August 2016, <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/157b05b4-255a-47b4-bd8b-9f715555fb44/TV-Drama-Diversity.pdf> and Screen Australia "Gender Matters: Women In The Australian Screen Industry", accessed 30 November 2015, <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/f20beab8-81cc-4499-92e9-02afb18c438/Gender-Matters-Women-in-the-Australian-Screen-Industry.pdf>.

Student films, in short, are *more*: more likely to be made by women, people of color, and others underrepresented in mainstream media, and more likely to feature these people as subjects and participants; more likely to experiment with the medium itself or with traditional narrative structures; more individual and more varied than what you can buy a ticket for at the multiplex. I might add, too, that in other countries, where the government may play an active role in censoring films, student films have demonstrably escaped this sort of notice and have often engaged more with volatile political or social issues.

However, the question remains: what happens to these diverse filmmakers and voices when they leave film school? Having a film school archive chart its inhabitants, opens research possibilities for film schools to enliven contemporary debates and contribute to data that may serve to challenge deficit perspectives and deeply entrenched structures within the film and television industry. Whilst this is a valuable topic, it is not one for in depth analysis in this thesis. My hope is that this research offers stimulus for further research into diversity and inclusion within the screen industry.

My survey of the current state of film school archives revealed an understanding of the significance of film school audiovisual memory, as recorders and contributors to cultural legacy. The possibilities for their historical research are clear, but yet not fully comprehended, simply because film school archives exist almost nowhere. In a 2007 article, Wylie (241) goes some way to explaining this, suggesting that the problem is not just to do with film schools, but rather our understanding and respect of audiovisual as a medium, stating that:

Broadcasters across the world have lost, never recorded or erased material, which they produced due to a combination of cultural, technical and economic reasons. This was often not a direct malicious act against radio and television but was more to do with the prevailing professional and cultural practice that treated broadcasting media as being ephemeral and culturally insignificant.

The way that audiences have interacted and engaged with films is seen by Archivist Liam Wylie to be part of this problem. The reason for this, in Wylie's words (2007, 241), is that; "Viewing or listening was for immediate reception by the audience," therefore, the notion of film as a cultural object, or historical artefact has traditionally been incongruent with society's film consumption trends.

In Wylie's view, the changing formats of filmmaking technology appear to have more to do with serving the needs of the audience experience (higher resolution, results in better picture quality, for immediate viewing) and practitioner ease (lighter cameras, more sensitive lenses, etc.), and less to do with preserving its content and format (241). I suggest that film schools would be wise to become cognisant of the ways that their archives could help interpret, interrogate, explore, and highlight past and contemporary history. This is important because students are active contributors to the social and cultural milieu of our world. However, the need to understand the importance of digital preservation to ensure the material is safeguarded is vital to this. With this in mind, I will now turn to a brief survey of the film preservation landscape in Australia.

2.3 FILM PRESERVATION LANDSCAPE IN AUSTRALIA

For well over three decades, the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) has operated as Australia's cultural heritage home, housing many of Australia's most iconic audiovisual collections. Its roots date back to the 1930s, where the Commonwealth National Library managed the film and sound recordings (NFSA Timeline over 30 Years of the National Film and Sound Archive.)¹¹

The significance of preserving film and sound only started to gain attention in the 1970s, amidst anxiety around the vulnerability of nitrate film collection in the library's holding. Lobbyists started to advocate for a separate body to preserve, protect, maintain, and provide access to the growing archive. The increased pressure led to a formal cabinet minister's decision to separate the NFSA from the National Library, which opened its doors in 1984.

The NFSA has since grown to be a digital preservation and sustainability leader in the cultural sector, yet, like many arts and cultural institutions in Australia, it has also been under consistent financial pressure due to its funding structure. The Federal Budget cuts of 2014 resulted in significant staff and resourcing cuts, and a later restructure saw former CEO Jan Muller, of the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, join the NFSA in 2017, announcing that digitisation was at the top of his agenda. According to Australia's premier independent

¹¹ "NFSA." Accessed June 16, 2019. <https://timeline.nfsaa.com/the-early-years-2/>

filmmaking magazine, *Inside Film* (IF), achieving such a large-scale digitisation project was an unrealistic dream. Groves (2017) claimed:

A seven-year program to digitise the Netherlands' audio-visual collection was completed in 2014 at a cost of \$A200 million. The NFSA receives about \$26 million in funding from the Federal Government each year.¹²

This vast gap in funding put the NFSA at a significant disadvantage to international cultural organisations facing the same problem. Rather than acting, the organisation seemed to be stuck in a cycle of lobbying for support to address the problem of film preservation (Elkington, 2016, 264). It was not until the release of the NFSA paper in 2015, *Deadline 2025: Collections at Risk*, that alarm bells were sounded on the fate of magnetic media. It was a *fait accompli* - digital disruption had taken over. There was clearly a threat of media and format obsolescence, and it was a major problem for those holding irreplaceable audiovisual history.

The NFSA subsequently embarked on an ambitious digitisation strategy, with Muller announcing in 2018 that "the future of audio-visual archives is digital."¹³ NFSA wanted to position itself as a national leader in preservation, and digitisation was at the heart of achieving this. Peak bodies, such as *The Science and Technology Council of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences* (2007), *The National Archives of Australia* (2006) and UNESCO, with its *Charter on the preservation of the digital heritage* (2003) all served to support a narrative stating the need to guard against the loss of cultural heritage so that it remains accessible to the public.

Other large-scale cultural institutions, such as Museum Australia and the National Library of Australia, possess much smaller audiovisual collections. All these institutions have developed digitisation policies to preserve, protect, and provide access to the material they house. Across Australia, funding for film preservation nationally is limited to Government funding through the Department of Communications and the Arts. The National Library is also funded by the Australian Government and offers Community Heritage Grants up to AUD 15,000 for film preservation projects.

¹² Groves, Don. "NFSA CEO Jan Müller on How to Save Australia's Audiovisual Heritage." if.com.au, November 9, 2017. <https://www.if.com.au/nfsa-ceo-jan-muller-save-australias-audiovisual-heritage/>.

¹³ "NFSA: Strategic Vision for a Digital Archive." Canberra: National Film and Sound Archive, 2018. <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/about/corporate-information/publications/strategic-plan-2016-2020>.

On a more local front, The University of Melbourne, whereby this thesis project takes place, has only recently begun to review its audiovisual collections with its Petascale Campus Initiative (PCI) – a five year plan to expedite the University's capacity for increasing data intensive research over 2018 to 2022.¹⁴ Whilst embarking on this project, University wide planning has begun to rapidly strategise and develop digital research infrastructure, services, and expertise to provide support for the management of its audiovisual and other collections.

The VCA FTV archive has maintained master formats and backup copies of its student films across a 50-year period, representing a quarter of postcolonial Australia's history, however there contained no actual archival and film preservation strategy in place. The VCA student films were managed in an ad hoc, albeit methodical way, by administrative staff and stored in a room that contained industrial shelving racks situated next to the staff room. The door label identified it informally as "The Archive Room."



FIGURE 1 INSIDE THE ARCHIVE ROOM AT VCA FILM AND TELEVISION

FIGURE 2 STORAGE OF 16MM CELLULOID FILMS IN THE ARCHIVE ROOM.

¹⁴ Research Gateway. "Petascale Campus Initiative." The University of Melbourne. Accessed June 7, 2020. <https://gateway.research.unimelb.edu.au/resources/platforms-infrastructure-and-equipment/petascale-campus-initiative>.

Best practice decrees that a traditional archive room should be temperature controlled, which is necessary to store film and magnetic tape adequately.¹⁵ This 'archive' room had no thermostat controls and was fast on its way to becoming a storage room for staff room morning tea supplies and event party liquor supply.



FIGURE 3 INSIDE THE VCA ARCHIVE ROOM: BOXES LAY STREWN ACROSS THE FLOOR.

The core work of the VCA Film School has always been the practice of *filmmaking*, not film *preservation*, which has meant there has been no such expertise in the department to provide this knowledge. The lack of alignment between the University and the Film School's obligation to protect and preserve its student audiovisual collection became increasingly apparent as this story unfolded, which spoke to the more widespread national problem of preservation, as articulated by the NFSA's digitisation strategy.

¹⁵ Hodgkinson, Adam, and Joe Kelly. "The Time to Digitise Is Now. Are You Ready?" DAMsmart. Accessed February 10, 2015. <https://damsmart.com.au/about-us/digitisation-white-paper/>.

2.4 FILM PRESERVATION CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The practice of cataloguing and preserving the VCA student films to make the material available was a daunting task, with many technological implications and digital storage challenges. Whilst preservation guides, such as Fossati's *From Grain to Pixel* (2009) and the National Film Preservation Foundation's *Film Preservation Guide* (2004) offer historians and institutions deep and practical insight into how to protect and preserve film material, the literature commonly revealed challenges with film preservation projects. Lack of time, resourcing, equipment, and funding were the key problems cited in ensuring the large numbers of film and analogue material could be sufficiently digitised. The high costs associated with digitisation threatens many archive projects' viability and access to their records (Wengstrom 2015), excluding many important cultural archives from being protected. Archives within societies, communities, or groups that cannot afford digitisation costs may be omitted from our understanding of history. The digital divide appeared to mimic screen culture discourse about privileging neo-colonial western paradigms to the exclusion of marginalised voices (Screen Australia 2015 and 2016). Bastian and Alexander (2009) recommend community archive initiatives to include underrepresented voices. They suggest that advocates may step up in communities, individuals, or teams within large institutions to drive such projects, but as these are often grassroots initiatives, the ongoing lack of resourcing and investment can threaten such initiatives and their long-term sustainability.

The challenge of pursuing a digital preservation project for the VCA film school appeared formidable. On top of this, Ray Edmondson (2013) in his UNESCO publication, *Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles*, cites a growing list of considerations to do with the impermanence of digital technology. He warns: "Issues of software and hardware progression, commercial versus public interest, economic sustainability, and risk management, among others, lie ahead" (2013, 71).

The need to articulate an object's cultural context, as supported by Beaudoin (2012), seemed to be ever greater. Knowledge of an object's context facilitates understanding of how to preserve, care, and use the objects in a range of interdisciplinary settings and across discourses. Contextual information can be identified through standardised metadata acting as an impetus for researchers to determine its significance and/or offer new ways to approach and view the

material. Gilliland (2014, 176) describes a record (in our case, I am suggesting that our student films are the records) as:

... always associated with some action, transaction, or event; a record can be a product, a by-product of, or even an agent or actor in action, transaction, or event; and a record includes, at a minimum, a definable set of metadata that serves to provide contextual and other forms of evidence about that action, transaction, or event.

The defined set of metadata that the project team believed were unique to a film school collection will be discussed in the following chapters. This metadata offers our collection the ability to be data mined and enhanced for future research opportunities.

Fossati (2009) suggests that the nexus between archival practice and theory needs to be better defined. To ensure the preservation of our film heritage, film archives and museums should play a greater role in the future in terms of providing greater contextualisation between education around the artefact or original format of the film and its digital counterpart. Indeed, Jenkins (2009) and Manovich (2010) identify the film as part of a bigger picture within the digital media and participatory landscape. According to Edmondson (2016, 2):

... individual practitioners in audio-visual archives have long lacked a clear professional identity and recognition within the memory professions, government, the audio-visual industries and the community in general.

This level of uncertainty about the profession and future of archives within the digital era suggests there may be an opportunity for political, social and cultural institutions, like universities, to help drive and shape technological change and education in the areas of film, audiovisual and cultural heritage preservation. This could be achieved through making archiving a compulsory part of screen, culture and media courses, similar to what UBKW film school has done, as highlighted in section 2.2.

2.5 CONTEMPORARY ARCHIVES: CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

When surveying the literature in the field of archives and records, it became apparent that Derrida's oft quoted saying, "nothing is less clear today than the word archive (1995, 57)" rang as true as ever. With the advent of digital technologies, contemporary discussions about archives drew attention to the internet's networked ecology, whereby users expect access to everyone and everything *and right now*. It seemed that any discussion around more traditional archives turned into conversations around the growing nature of digital archives. Concerning student film archives, McErlean (2015, 55) says:

Digital archives are growing exponentially. Storage issues are being evolved through the digitisation of content. The traditional process of selecting only significant works for archives will be replaced by a system of storing and meta-tagging 'everything' created by students, for future researchers to data-mine influenced by their contemporary social mores.

In and around these conversations, there appeared to be tensions amongst scholars and archivists to do with notions of self archiving (think Facebook, Instagram, Google images), revealing common misconceptions about 'digitisation' being the long-term solution. This does not consider software changes, degradation of hard drives, and the need to constantly migrate from formats and files to storage solutions, potentially compromising image quality, all with the view to ensure endurance and recoverability (Edmondson 2016, 65). Add to this issue the large size of digital files and databases and the inability of local storage devices to accommodate many of them.

The nature of archiving and archival strategies about the selection and classification of material have been outlined in archival science literature (Cook 2001; Upward 1995; McKemmish 1997, Gilliland 2014). Surrounding this were questions concerning copyright and the legal ramifications to do with open access and streaming. I could see that our project was in line with the perspectives of Cook 2001; Reed 2005; Bastian 2009; Gilliland 2014, all who viewed archival thinking and practice as complex and multifaceted, operating across multiple contexts and jurisdictions. According to Gilliland (2014, 43):

Archives reframed and optimized in light of these shifting public and scholarly expectations, needs, and behaviours, as well as the imperatives and opportunities

associated with digital information and communications technology, have the potential to tell more stories and to support new types of users and new ways of doing research on archival holdings of all kinds and of any provenance.

This literature helped me see that films in the VCA archive could serve as a stimulus for new ways of telling and exploring gaps in narrative storytelling through themes or subjects or character analysis (to name but a few ideas). The opportunity of shifting my focus towards embracing the Film School archive as 'embodied memory' (Gilliland 2014, 41) within and beyond the institutional setting of the University, further seeing the films as 'acts of transfer' (Gilliland 2014, 1), from one generation to the next, continued to broaden my scope of thinking.

Most evident in the literature was a clear telling of the power inherent in archives and records and how they influenced the remembering of society, bureaucracies, communities, and individual lives. Just as quickly as the archive was acknowledged as an authentic source of truth and witness bearer to history and its events, it was also berated for its propagation of centralized narratives, most often at the cost of those silenced, omitted, or marginalized from our existence (Gilliland 2014, 1). As Gilliland (2014, 38) firmly states:

While archives and the records they contain generally do not explicitly intend to be unrepresentative of different perspectives, experiences, and epistemologies, they inevitably and inexorably reflect and legitimize how, when, why, and by whom those records were generated and preserved. Furthermore, different recordkeeping and archival systems, regardless of the power associated with them, are also predicated on differing worldviews that may well be in contestation with one another.

Opening the VCA archive films for research and pedagogy would enable a critical examination, backed by data, to assist in enlivening discourse around representation. Whose voices dominated the Film School archive. What stories were the film students telling? Why? Who else could be telling them? Access to this data and information could radically influence the next generation of filmmakers and potentially the film school demographics through impacting the admissions policies and procedures.

2.6 FILM AS RECORD CONTINUUM

As my research traversed the fields of archives, I began to see clear connections between archives and records, which seemed analogous to each other. This relationship is explained by Gilliland (2014) who tells us that:

... in English-speaking countries the term 'archives' usually denotes records which have been recognized as having long-term value. The term 'archives' can also be used more widely, to refer to collections of historical materials maintained by organizations, individuals, families or community groups, or to the locations where such materials are held (quoted in the introduction by Geoffrey Yeo in Bastian and Alexander 2009).

The interconnection between both disciplines was strikingly like the connection between film as art and film as a business. The vernacular used to commonly describe the film industry is 'showbusiness,' highlighting the relationships between film as 'art' and film as 'product.' With respects to the digital archive project, located within a tertiary institution, I began to see the relevance of this dichotomy. The student films could be described simultaneously as a film (or filmmaker/student) record, offering insight into individual filmmaker career trajectories. Concurrently, it remained a pedagogical/ research record into the type of training and assessment offered and acted as a cultural/artistic object and as historical/archival material. These objects, records and approaches contributed to discourse and records of broader historical issues, movements, and moments in time.

The conceptual framework of the records continuum model (Upward 1995; McKemmish 1997, 2001; Reed 2005) inspired me to see the multimodal potential of filmmaking and the works produced within it. In many ways, I had taken for granted the long-term and enduring value of a film. Instead, I had focused primarily on the process of making and then the film's reception with an audience. This limited the potentiality of the process for me and so I became energised when reading about records being or *becoming* dynamic and alive. The records continuum model is articulated by McKemmish (2001, 334) who says that:

The model was built on a unifying concept of records inclusive of archives defined as records of continuing value. It also drew on ideas about the "fixed" and "mutable" nature of records, the notion that records are "always in the process of becoming," and

articulations of the role of recordkeeping in archiving and society concerning governance, accountability, identity, memory, and information provision.

As referred to earlier, in the screen industry, the producer's formal filmmaking process begins when they legally take on the ownership of a screen project (this is known as optioning or taking an assignment of a piece of work). The producer's role often carries through its full life cycle (financing and development, pre-production, production, postproduction, through to distribution and marketing). Drawing on the records continuum model, helped me to understand that the final phase of filmmaking (distribution) ultimately has no perceived end. The enduring value of film as a record could span generations to come. An example is the infamous (and notably racist) D.W. Griffith's film, *Birth of a Nation* (1916). This film has most certainly had its mutations, as it went from a celebrated piece of period filmmaking to being described as "...the midwife in the rebirth of the most vicious terrorist organisation in the history of the United States" (referring to the Ku Klux Klan) (Franklin 1979, 41). This provocative example shows how the permutation of film crosses the spectrum of cultural, historical, social, political, and aesthetic contexts of use. Thus, film as a record, traverses through time and space.

Similarly, McKemmish (1997, 8) describes the continuum of the record as both "current and historical" from its conception:

By definition they are 'frozen' in time, fixed in a documentary form and linked to their context of creation. They are thus time and space bound, perpetually connected to events in the past. Yet they are also disembodied, carried forward through time and space, and re-presented in the contexts of their use.

Perhaps too, the contexts of use are shaped by our critical engagement with the work, which evolve over time and influence context. The contextual use of archives and records is further enhanced when they are made accessible to the public. New technologies have changed how we interact and engage with stories and artistic works. The digital archive developed in response to access needs within the age of 'participatory culture,' a term coined by Henry Jenkins (2006, 2009). Jenkins (2009, 90) discusses how stories that cross multiple platforms often have the most impact:

Students learn about multimodality and transmedia navigation when they take time to focus on how stories change as they move across different production and reception contexts, as they give consideration to the affordances and conventions of different media.

The VCA digital archive intends to show the student, implicitly and explicitly, the multiplicity of screen work. For example, a work is simultaneously created as an educational assignment, and as a creative output. The duality of the students work sits amongst other works within a cohort and a body of filmmakers. Their film is also a thematic piece that can be categorised within a broader remit (and body) of screen works touching on similar themes and or genres and in which its meaning evolves.

Finally, by having the students input standardised metadata, it implicitly connects their work to an audiovisual lineage of filmmaking practice, defined by a set of variables that enable greater search capacity for a broad audience looking to research and engage with student films across multiple modes of representation. The record continuum's conceptual model drew me to a phenomenological framework of thinking that embraced the idea of the body as archive/ archive as body and the archive's rhizomatic structure across the networked society.

2.7 BODY AS ARCHIVE | ARCHIVE AS BODY | MEMORY ARCHIVE

The phenomenological concept of the body as archive / archive as body intrigued me because it represented the depth and profundity inherent in the digital archive project. A body of short film works – stored on tangible media, moves through a process of transformation (digitisation) to then be transported through and into a digital interface. This new body traces a lineage of filmmakers and their bodies of work, amongst other bodies, for audiences to *embody* as knowledge fragments of practice, experience and memory.

Danish theatre practitioner Lise Aagaard Knudsen (2016) appropriated the term the ‘archive-body’ from Ea Sola, a Vietnamese dance artist. Knudsen discusses Sola’s work as her “imagining”, describing it as; “the body as being a historical body, and therefore a political one; a memory body and an archive-body (Knudsen, 2016, 71).” Knudsen goes on to differentiate between the two terms, *body-archive/ archive-body* as being:

... between the stable – though over time slightly shifting - memory, content (the body-archive) and the relational, interactive interface of these experiences (the archive-body). The archive-body is the behaviour that links the experienced body to the world. Meaning that the archive-body interacts with the world *through* the experiences from the body-archive, and therefore can be perceived as a practice (2016, 71-72).

In the VCA-DAP, I propose that the memory and content of the films are the *body-archive* and the films grow and thrive in relationship with the archive interface and its users, seen as the *archive-body*. When I viewed the digital archive project through this lens, it seemed like a natural extension to move from the records continuum model into thinking about filmmaking as an eco-system which evolves and changes over time. However, this is not fully illustrated until chapter 7, section 7.3 because this process of thinking did not consolidate until I had defined my living educational theory. All these aspects culminated as a result of my dialogue between practice and theory.

The body-archive / archive-body further inspired the idea of the digital archive as ‘living’, a term originally coined by Carlin and Mullet (2010) in the development and creation of the Australian multimodal and participatory digital archive project which tells the history of Australian circus company, Circus Oz. The aspirations of this project excited my thinking in the early stages of the VCA digital archive project as the researchers sought to be “both an archive and part of the repertoire of the company; this reveals various tensions and broader questions for the development of such digital archives as sites of digital creativity (Carlin 2014, 99).”

The *archive as repertoire* is a term also found in the discipline of dance and furthers the idea of archive-as-body/ body-as-archive. Taylor (2014, 19-20) suggests the *repertoire* is what enacts, transmits and embodies practice through the exchange of knowledge when the archive is ‘performed’. Later in this thesis, I utilise this thinking in a curatorial project, designed to encourage a diverse range of writers to draw on the films in the archive as stimulus from which to create artistic texts and thus embody and create new knowledge.

The interdisciplinary nature of this research continually expanded new ways of thinking about the archive and its collective consciousness. Seeing the archive as a body, gave the project a pulse. An inherent aim in the project was to breathe new life into a staid and dying collection; bodies of work that had gone cold, been left behind, waiting to disintegrate in the magnetic

mortuary and cavern of celluloid.¹⁶ For it was indeed the students who had mused that their films went into the VCA Vault (a term used by the students and staff to describe the archive) and *died*.

The theme of the body as archive is more thoroughly played out in dance and performance studies literature (Lepecki 2010; Taylor 2003), where the body is viewed as a container of space and the place from which we connect to the world. For Video Dance Artist, Jeannette Ginslov (2016) it is, “Through our bodies, (*that*) we make contact, contain, remember and remake living stories, create memories, narratives and meaning for ourselves and others.”

Similarly, it is through the archive that we can make and create, hold and discover meaning. For the archive stores our memory and enables us to interpret / re-interpret our (its) significance. The phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty aspired to characterise the world of human experience and believed the human body was essential to the structure of this experience. In *Phenomenology and Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1945, 275) contemplates that it is through the body that we make sense of and experience the world:

In short, my body is not only an object among all other objects, a nexus of sensible qualities among others, but an object which is sensitive to all the rest, which reverberates to all sounds, vibrates to all colours, and provides words with their primordial significance through the way in which it receives them.

Seeing the archive within this phenomenological construct, as a body; a student body, an historical and contemporary body of film works and practice(s), therefore offers insight into how film students and researchers may make sense of, identify and experience history and our prevailing human condition, from which multiple perspectives can then derive. Merleau-Ponty (1945, 215) explores the idea of knowledge coming through the body, highlighting the potential power in the transference of ideas inherent in the idea of archive as body. He states:

This object is genuinely present and fully comprehended when the powers of my body adjust themselves to it and overlap it. The gesture presents itself to me as a question, bringing certain perceptible bits of the world to my notice, and inviting my concurrence

¹⁶ In August of 2018, I published a short piece about the digital archive project in the Australian Archivists online newsletter publication, which referred to the films in the film school archive this way. See Lyon, “A Short Story about Magnetic Memories; Caverns of Celluloid; and Making Meaning.”

in them. Communication is achieved when my conduct identifies this path with its own. There is mutual confirmation between myself and others.

Viewing the archive as representative of a body opens endless creative possibilities and opportunities for repurposing and re-engaging with new audiences. There is a mutual exchange of ideas inherent in making a collection accessible. Like Merleau-Ponty's view of the body, it brings new insights into the world and invites us to respond – be it as an act of passive viewing pleasure or as a chance to reflect, make meaning and comment (Ginslov 2016). The myriad of moving image objects at our disposal offers limitless potentialities – enabling us to see each interaction, each viewing, each “object” as communicative, beyond the desired scope of the project. The simple act of its being enables a transference.

In a 2010 article; writer, curator and scholar, Andre Lepecki explores the notion of body as archive in dance re-enactments suggesting that it “...re-places and diverts notions of archive away from a documental deposit or bureaucratic agency dedicated to the (mis)management of “the past” (2010, 34).” Lepecki is aware of how these ideas challenge preconceived notions of what is a document or ‘object’ and how the consideration of the body as a living archive expands our ideas about the body in general. He muses that “a body may have always already been nothing other than an archive (2010, 34).” To consider the VCA-DAP archive as a living, breathing, behaving body, then what is put into it (our film objects) are not the same as what the user will get out. Phenomenologically then, everything we are - *is archive*. Knowledge must be passed on, transferred through and by the body/ archive.

Archive as memory (both as container of personal, collective and institutional memory) has been another expansive way to view this digital archive project. The boundless nature of the archive encouraged me to think of it as a living, breathing organism, skyrocketing it through its dimension of time and space (McKemmish 2001). The permeable nature of the archive in the thinking of Lepecki (2010), Carlin (2014), Taylor (2014), and Knudsen (2015), emphasise an active collective consciousness that is reciprocal, tangible, physical and therefore even *alive*. In consonance with Taylor (2014, 160); “Cultural memory is, among other things, a practice, an act of imagination and interconnection.” These fragments of memory become a mosaic; films assembled within the archive, forming new memory, and creating new knowledge.

2.8 A RHIZOMATIC VIEW OF THE ARCHIVE

My fascination with the phenomenological thinking of the archive as body/ body as archive naturally carried me down a path of looking at the works of philosopher Derrida and Prenowitz (1995) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Initially, it was my research into American scholar Henry Jenkins (2009) and his research into media interactivity and its relationship with audience participation in a digitally disruptive world, that provided the impetus to pursue further research in areas of networked thinking. These ideas also led me to Marshall McLuhan's (1964) concept of the 'global village,' and the 'medium is the message.' McLuhan proposed that the communication medium (in our case the internet) carries the message rather than the messages being central to the medium. In the VCA-DAP this meant the films did not necessarily carry the message, it was the internet, or digital archive interface. According to McLuhan (2013, 14), it is through the effects of technology that we are increasingly interconnected:

What we are considering here, however, are the psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns as they amplify or accelerate existing processes. For the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.

Viewing the archive from a McLuhan-esque and digital perspective meant embracing wholly the idea that the individualized content (the films) were not necessarily the sole messages inherent in the overarching narrative of the project. Rather, like the archive as a body, it is the connectivity of the internet as a network, which becomes the technological carrier in which ideas are transmuted. To me, this created boundless and multiple consequences inherent in the technology, resulting in an extension of the archive's usage or capabilities.

Expanding on this is Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophic concept of the "rhizome," which sends out roots and shoots from its nodes that can extend horizontally and grow upwards – like the iris plant. Rhizomes can break off, and new nodes can begin, thus suggesting multiplicities. As referenced earlier, theorist Richard Coyne (2008, 3) describes the rhizomatic system as "dynamic and unresolved, growing and anarchic, in the manner of a rich and open-ended conversation." Seeing the digital archive project as a rhizomatic structure, in which conversations about past, present, and future could grow and intersect inspired me to consider the digital archive as a multimodal discovery tool. I perceived this as transforming the

traditional archive from a fixed place of tangible objects to the preservation of, and access *into*, a living, breathing network of moving organisms, dynamic and continually growing. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 7) refer to this in another way suggesting that; "...any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order." The fragmented yet interconnected nature of the films in the archive touch on diverse themes, genres, locations, settings, diverse character worlds, and more. The nature of short films often mean they can be conversation starters and bite sized prompts to get the audience thinking about larger matters. There is generally not enough developed time to expand on the subject and its matter. Rather, the short form of filmmaking may encourage offshoots of thinking and conversation. This form can also aid filmmakers to develop their ideas and concepts for further discovery using longer formats and more traditional narrative conventions as they progress in their filmmaking journey.

Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 7) refer to the rhizome as something that "ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles." My research suggested that questions around shifting technologies and project sustainability seemed to undermine the powerful and creative dynamics inherent in this thinking. Rhizomatic thinking offered multiple entry points into and outside of the project. It invigorated my connection to the project and how my practice was contributing to the film school and beyond. However, I still wondered whether the potential challenges of creating a digital archive could be mitigated through developing a holistic strategy conceptualised within a phenomenological framework. This phenomenological framework, or metaphorical way of thinking, conceptualised the body as archive/ archive as body and illuminated the rhizomatic potential of archive. This served to enliven the material and my practice and continually created new points of interest and endless fascination with the VCA-DAP and how it could contribute to knowledge transfer, through the process of making the work accessible.

The above leads me to Derrida's discussion around the Freudian inspired notion of the 'death drive' associated with archives, which circled back to the crux of my thinking in Chapter One; the questions of 'why digitise?'; 'why tell this story?'. In their 1995 seminal book, *Archive Fever*, Derrida and Prenowitz (1995, 13) muse: "Why detain you with these worn-out stories? Why this wasted time? Why archive this?... Aren't these stories to be had everywhere?" Without proper action, the film school was driving fast into its own Freudian death, destined to leave no trace of itself and its belongings. It was doomed to become what Derrida and

Prenowitz (1995, 13) asserted as; "...the possibility of a radical perversion, indeed, a diabolical death drive, an aggression or a destruction drive: a drive, thus, of loss". I had to ask myself the question, why should I care? Why should I be the one to take on this project and produce a recall of its reality? Again, Derrida and Prenowitz (26) had the answer; "As much as and more than a thing of the past, before such a thing, the archive should *call into question* the coming of the future." Beyond the provocation that to archive is to respond to the fear of being forgotten; there is a challenge here for us to remember. For it is through the process of remembering that we recall, we re-create, we celebrate, and re-imagine things, many of which may have been forgotten. By doing this, we forge new connections and new nodes of discovery. There is a direct resonance here with my history of recalled abuse and trauma discussed earlier in this chapter. This assemblage of ideas can, therefore, then create further meaning.

2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Student films offer educators great potential to use as film exemplars from their predecessors to assist in setting other benchmarks for pedagogical engagement and encouraging original creative outcomes. The moving image, seen as a historical record and cultural artefact, may need to be broadened to encompass student films, moving them beyond tools for training into what scholar Rachel Wilson (2011) views as "historical documents in their own right." Comparable film schools have made their student works available to the public online but have not done so in a way that encourages teaching and learning opportunities with relevant metadata, curatorial opportunities, and enhanced search functions, suggesting there is potential for the VCA digital archive project to be a pioneer in this area.

The process of facilitating/ producing and bringing into being an otherwise dormant film collection offers enormous potential for other practitioners to insert themselves into the research process through the process of re-creation (of self / of the materials) and reflective analysis. The accessibility of networked technology on digital platforms alters our perceptions, values, and relationship with artistic works and is rapidly evolving in the digital media age, traveling along a continuum outside the dimensions of time and space.

Merleau-Ponty (1945) suggests that we understand others through and with our bodies. Connecting this to the archive as body/ body as archive suggests that the archive can act as a

schema from which we can establish (re-establish) identities and/or ways of seeing/ relating / connecting to establish a “bodily reciprocity” (Taylor 2003). In relation to the VCA-DAP this becomes a shared exchange of ideas and knowledge transfer between filmmakers and their films. There is an interoperability between the creator, product and receiver, influenced by the ease and functionality of a system (the digital archive).

Reflecting on the digital archive as rhizomatic in its roots became transformative, and this perspective produces alternative knowledge theories. From a pedagogical perspective, this conforms to the rhizomatic view of education that Cormier (2008, 7) ascribes to knowledge creation, stating that:

.... a distributed negotiation of knowledge can allow a community of people to legitimize the work they are doing among themselves, and for each member of the group, the rhizomatic model dispenses with the need for external validation of knowledge, either by an expert or by a constructed curriculum.

Current and future students (and past students via a request access process) can create knowledge within their unique contexts and contribute that knowledge to the living archive, generating more nodes connected to the film school network and its associations. The potential conversations within the VCA digital archive and the moving image are therefore endless. Conceptually, the rhizomatic network connects new nodes through search and discovery for teaching, learning, research, and engagement, and the body of the archive aids in our remembering. Seen through this conceptual lens, the VCA-DAP is ever expansive, evolving, and generative.

CHAPTER 3: ACTION RESEARCH AND FILMMAKING AS METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This research seeks to explore the stages and challenges inherent in producing a digital archive project for a film school archive and how it can effectively contribute to teaching, learning, research, and engagement through its access. In the previous chapter, I drew together findings from the various literature fields relevant to film school archives, film, and digital preservation and records management to arrive at a conceptual and theoretical framework to underpin the research. In this chapter, I discuss the various methodological approaches chosen to conduct the research. In the project's foundational (development phases), this involved qualitative research, followed by action research conducted by me, as a professional situated within a film school setting and finally an analysis of filmmaking as a mode of research practice.

In this chapter, I discuss the background and rationale for choosing these modes of practice, the roles I took on as a researcher, the study's conduct, and the data methods used. I conclude with an evaluation of action research and a statement of its limitations, in consideration of this research shifting its focus toward a more reflexive analysis into my practice as a producer. This resulted in a new course of action, as I began to recognise the process of filmmaking as a valid and reliable research methodology in and of itself.

3.1 EMBODYING ACTION: WHY ACTION RESEARCH?

Let us return momentarily to the project's theoretical framework, to the philosophic concept of the body as archive/ archive as body rooted in phenomenology. This conceptual framework helped inform my practice and research, making explicit the lens from which I viewed the project. In a 2006 article about practice-based research, Linda Candy (6) discusses the intrinsic connection between body and perception in relation to research that combines action, cognition and perception, stating that:

A reliable account of perception must take action into account. Further, one can argue that action, cognition and perception must be considered together in any adequate description.

As communicated in the previous chapter, the reciprocal nature of the VCA-DAP demanded then that these phenomenological parts of the research process (body-as-archive/ archive-as-body and perception) be recognized and unified – through taking action. Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the overarching methodologies chosen to drive this research project was that of action research.

Action research (AR), a method coined by American social psychologist Kurt Lewin in the mid-1940s, is predominantly used in educational change and is seen by many scholars in this area (Winter and Burroughs 1989; Zuber-Skerritt 1996; McNiff and Whitehead 2005; Whitehead and McNiff 2006; Reason and Bradbury 2008; Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014) as the most conducive approach to creating and driving organisational, educational and systematic change. The research design is cyclical, often stated simply as:

- *plan*
- *act*
- *observe*
- *reflect* (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2014, 6).

However, according to action researcher McTaggart (1996, 248), action research can often receive negative attention for this oversimplification and so he reframes the research as one standing outside of both method and procedure. McTaggart (in Zuber-Skerritt 1996, 248) sees it as; “a series of commitments to observe and problematize through practice of a series of principles for conducting social enquiry.”

Similarly, Reason and Bradbury (2008, 1) position this research mode as an “orientation to inquiry.” Their definition of AR helps describe my approach to this project:

Action research is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical

solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (Reason and Bradbury 2008, 4).

This characterisation clearly states that action research as an inquiry process aims to "produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives" (Reason and Bradbury 2008, 4). As a screen producer, my objective has been to create work that people connect and engage with through whatever platform the work is intended for. Hence, the motivation behind this project began as one of pure pragmatism. I intended to solve several problems connected to ingrained practices, such as institutional administration methods that were decades old and a lack of technical and contemporary solutions to current pedagogical, research, and industry needs and desires. Given the nature of my role as a producer and my background, it is not surprising therefore that my goal was to 'do' this project to produce practical knowledge through the creation of a digital archive that was useful and meaningful for past, current and future students, staff and researchers.

3.2 BUT, WHICH ACTION TO TAKE?

There are many modes of action research, one of which is known as pragmatic action research (Greenwood 2007). Comparable to this, is practitioner-based action research (Winter and Badley 2007), like practitioner-based enquiry. The latter is a process whereby the researcher adopts an "insider role" (Kerrigan and McIntyre 2010, 91) to illuminate the systems of creative practice. I believe that all these forms of enquiry are akin to Greenwood's (2007, 131) explanation of action research (AR) that highlights AR's ability to traverse across modes of praxis. Greenwood describes AR as neither method nor system, but rather "an approach to living in the world that includes the creation of arenas for collaborative learning and the design, enactment, and evaluation of liberating actions" (2007,131). Like Greenwood, I used AR as a 'strategy,' combining various methods and techniques to address the requirements necessary to deliver this project effectively. A producer may use a similar approach when constructing a film - using the story and project vision (conceived initially by the writer and then the director) to reveal the overall methodology.

As previously stated, I intended to pragmatically realise this project through 'doing it' rather than theoretically exploring it. In hindsight, I observed that I did not value the practice of screen producing enough to consider it, in and of itself, a justifiable and rigorous research approach

in which to ‘do’ the project and take action. Thus, I went on a long and winding road over many years, oscillating between various modes of action research, from practitioner action research to critical participatory action research, through collaborative and educational action research. These approaches and lines of inquiry helped drive the project forward, but I seemed to continually spiral back into my producing skills and the processes by which I would make and conceive a film project. These included audience analyses, defining the project vision, identifying and approaching stakeholders and collaborators, risk and budget analysis, and establishing a project framework and guidelines. The recontextualisation of archival screen works formed the heart of this project, on top of which alternative narratives of past and present perspectives could be etched. Nevertheless, it took me many years of undertaking this research to realise the cultural and historical value of reappraising the student film works as a legitimate form of research, situated in screen production (filmmaking) research.

3.3 SYNERGIES IN ACTION RESEARCH AND SCREEN PRODUCING

According to Bob Dick (1993), action research is generally participative and relies on others to achieve results. I have found the process of filmmaking as responsive, flexible, and creative, which Dick (1993) refers to as key attributes of Action Research. Furthermore, educational theorist, John Dewey (1938), sought to situate education as both a pragmatic and an experimental field of inquiry to enliven and drive its process. Dewey (1938) asserted that practical problems demand practical solutions. Likewise, producing films is often about finding solutions to practical problems that arise from attempting to realise the creative aspects of film production in tandem with managing and complying with the various technical, legislative, and economic requirements. The ‘show’ and ‘business’ aspects of filmmaking make it both a challenging and demanding profession and process (Finney 2014, 212) and requires the producer to operate across disciplines and draw on many fields of knowledge.

Filmmaking, the educational philosophies of Dewey, and action research principles all share many similarities. Firstly, they are collaborative in nature (underpinned by what Dewey refers to as a “co-operative design,” whereby everyone involved in a project is engaged in process of learning (1938, 72). Secondly, they all require responsive action to practical problems situated within creative and economic parameters. Just like making a film, the demands of working on this digital archive project were very high due to its technical needs and the resources required, however the educational, social, cultural and collaborative benefits inherent in the project, far

outweighed any of these negative concerns. The project continued to afford me artistic and creative satisfaction, often seen as the motivating factor for many producers (Spicer et al. 2014, 138).

3.4 REFLECTION IN ACTION

As a practitioner, developing a screen project can often mean embracing the idea of the unknown (Guillaumier 2016, 355). Reflection as a process was built into my undergraduate degree majoring in performance studies and is a process that I believe is vital to professional practice and my ongoing personal development. However, it was not until following the AR methodology that I began to critically evaluate the significance and value of reflection as a creative process. Fundamental to AR is its combination of action and research, culminating in what Greenwood (2007, 133) describes as "reflection and action in an ongoing cycle of co-generative knowledge creation."

Turning to my filmmaking practice, after reading Schon (1983, 1991), I realised I had been operating professionally as a screen producer with tacit knowledge of my practice, what Schon would describe as 'knowing-in-practice.' My understanding of practice was in many ways a form of research, not yet made explicit. In one of the myriad examples Schon uses to tease out his inquiry into epistemological practice (how we come to know), he analyses how a professional engages with a staff member to realise a project. Schon (1983, 165) reflects on how the professional arrives at knowledge creation, stating that; "In their problem setting, means and ends are framed interdependently. And their inquiry is a transaction with the situation in which knowing and doing are inseparable."

As I performed each task required in the digital archive project, I determined at each moment, either through conversation with the many stakeholders involved, meetings, emails, or through the act of asking questions, what directions I would need to take to construct new action. In this way, it fitted Schon's deductive reasoning that "action on the situation is integral with deciding, and problem-solving is a part of the larger experiment in problem setting (165)."

For example, when I encountered problems about how to proceed in the research, I would naturally reach out to experts in the problem area (for example, challenges to do with the digitisation, post-production, or technical procedures) to decide the next step to take and effectively find a solution to the problem I was facing.

During the action research stages of sharing and reflection, I found myself drawn to the narrative inquiry practices inherent in AR, as described by Pushor and Clandinin (2009, 2) in *The SAGE Handbook of Educational Action Research*:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience.

My first foray into writing about my experience in the early stages of the project resulted in an article for the University of Melbourne's Cultural Collection magazine. From this, I was invited to write a piece for the online publication; *The Conversation* in response to the news that VHS tape was no longer going to be manufactured and thus would be rendered obsolete. I wrote a love letter to the VHS tape, lamenting on how I used the medium in my teens to make films. This creative response provoked me to think about my experience with magnetic media and filmmaking in greater depth. I became curious as to why I was drawn to screen practice, telling stories through film and helping tell others' stories (through the digital archive project).

I began to see that my early filmmaking attempted to narrate a sense of my fractured self from my childhood abuse. Through this personal lens, the project became more meaningful. This insertion of myself into the research is in many ways in line with scholar Hahn's (2006, 89) discussion of feminist ethnographic research approaches. Hahn (89) describes the process as reflexive and one that acknowledges the researcher's identity; "...and the effect of her presence on the resulting work. The lens through which we view others is turned back on ourselves."

Through creatively and pragmatically writing about the project, I turned the project back onto myself and reimagined it on a personal level, which helped me maintain a sense of curiosity and passion in the process. Although the project's pragmatic construction followed a relatively straight line, the research continued to develop within this open-ended, reflexive approach, where my experiences, past, and present, took on further iterations and meaning.

3.5 CONDUCT OF THE STUDY | RESEARCHER ROLES

This section provides an overview of this research's conduct, with the focus being on my role as an action researcher within this. I will discuss my approaches to data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and reflection within action research.

RESEARCHER ROLES

My role as a researcher arose due to VCA staff and students feeling that something needed to be done about how its audiovisual holdings were being managed within the film school. Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014, 34) discuss the idea of 'communicative action' in AR, as a process of 'interruption' – whereby the people challenge a current situation within it.¹⁷ This often starts with people inside an organisation questioning their practice and how things are being done. My research, therefore, was not about me researching a film school archive. Rather, I researched *for* and *with* the film school. I was not a neutral observer; I actively participated in implementing change and achieving the research outcomes.

When a researcher takes on such an active role, it can prove complex and problematic. For example, two key issues emerged from this; the first was that I began to identify myself as an agent of change. The problem with this was that it meant adopting several different hats to see the project through – from novice to archivist, to expert, through to a colleague, theorist, designer, and director. The complexity and shifting nature of these roles are expanded upon in more detail throughout the thesis as it became apparent that without me leading the charge, the project would stall significantly and may not even be realised. I mention this not to blow my own trumpet, but instead to highlight a major challenge in designing and implementing a more grassroots digital archive project, that although was set in an institution, did not have its full and integrated support.

The project was achieved and only possible through many volunteers – from students to staff, to administrators. At times, the project's pragmatics and management became all-consuming and disrupted the ideals of making it truly participatory and collaborative (an early intention)

¹⁷ The term 'communicative action' is referred to here by Kemmis, Nixon and McTaggart (2014, 34) as taken from German social theorist Jurgen Habermas (1987, 1996). It is considered a concise and open discourse focused on understanding and learning in order to contribute to social and participatory change in a situation.

– once again positioning me as the primary driver. It was often up to me to continue to generate interest, create milestones, and ensure that outcomes were achieved.

The lack of resources at times also meant that the project took longer than anticipated and progressed slowly. A Deweyan analysis of these roles' shifting nature suggests the project did remain participatory, with 'co-operative' and 'interacting parts' consistently at play (Dewey 1938, 53). My individual actions were always a response to the whole situation and project, in which there were many individual and moving parts.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This thesis research utilised several qualitative tools for data collection to foster reflexive engagement and encourage a deeper understanding of the project's impact. The purpose of collecting this type of data was to explore and create context, provide evidence of meetings and events, affirm perceptions, and foster a search for new meanings, challenges, and affordances. The data gathering tools that were drawn upon include:

- Interviews with personnel from film schools and cultural organisations to initially scope the project and provide best practice insight – achieved through qualitative research.
- Records of meetings, emails, conversations, and events, including minutes.
- Email correspondence with filmmakers about the project.
- Focus group discussion notes with students.
- Professional research into the design and development of an online portal to display the film works.
- Diary notes and online journal writing to capture personal reflection and impressions.
- Photographs.
- Articles written at various points to present findings of the project.
- Written material as part the original masters by research, which I then transferred to a PhD due to the complexity and project ambition.

This data was consolidated and analysed in the writing stage to draw out key ideas, connections, and understandings related to the project's realisation, identifying purpose, audience, and design. This information was vital in the action research process, enabling these data points to contribute to the next plan of action to move the project forward at each given stage.

In a 2007 article, Winter (259) views action research as a "transformative relationship with the physical world and with other people, which cumulatively creates and re-creates the self." His early writings around collecting data focused on its opportunity to develop ideas and create context from multiple perspectives. By the end of the project's first phase (Project Development: From Concept to Production (2014 – 2016), explored in chapter four, I had formulated a clear proposal and strategy for developing and implementing the digital archive project.

My initial entry into this research as a master's research project was to use qualitative research methods, using interviews to gather data. This acted as a precursor to the overall study and came about by being awarded a professional development grant to research best practice processes in developing and implementing a digital archive for a hybrid audiovisual archive belonging to a film school. I chose several reputable film schools and cultural institutions in Europe and the United States to help benchmark the project and better understand and explore the processes of developing and creating a digital archive project. I report on these findings in

Chapter Four as they influenced my understanding and thinking of issues to do with digital preservation and access, the project framework, and its significance.

3.7 EVALUATING ACTION RESEARCH: OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

Throughout this research I oscillated between the various modes of action research– from critical participatory AR to collaborative and educational AR. In the end, I most aligned to pragmatic and practitioner AR (Greenwood 2007 and Winter and Badley 2007). I also found that reading Dewey's theoretical stance on education led me to believe that AR as a mode of inquiry was not just one thing and therefore I could still 'do' this type of research, without fitting into any one camp. Action research is a way of learning by doing and therefore making meaning *of, by, and for* (Dewey 1938, 29) and *within* each process of acting, observing and reflecting. These multitudes of approaches have enabled me to conceive this project more fully. Importantly, I began to see the research as a generative, cyclical, and transformative process, thus contributing to the idea of a 'living archive' and, later, contributing to the development of my own living educational theory. This theory is based on the emancipation of the archive and the films within it and a critical *and self-critical* inquiry into my practice, which in many ways evolved into the emancipation of my practice and myself within it.

The process I undertook was fuelled by this commitment to act through a series of measured sequences to create change in how the VCA institution protected and provided access to its audiovisual collection. As I moved through the cyclical, continuous process of action research, it played out predictably like action researcher Zuber-Skerrit (1996, 95) claimed when she described how the process of organisational change is:

... based on team collaboration, coordination, commitment and competence; and it needs to foster critical, double-loop learning in order to effect real change and emancipation, not only for the participants themselves, but also for the organization as a whole.

Like, as described in Chapter Two, I desired to emancipate the VCA film and television student film collection. In the process of ‘doing’ I began to emancipate myself as I engaged in systematic reflection, which is regarded as a powerful way for practitioners to learn (Schon, 1983). It was during the writing of this dissertation, that the in-built reflexivity that I had gained through ‘knowing-in-practice’ moved from tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. This contributed to deeper respect and appreciation of how I had used my professional practice and the methodology inherent in filmmaking, in unison with the above processes of action, to further the research stages.

3.8 USING THE FILMMAKING PRODUCTION PROCESS TO INFORM METHODOLOGY

As the research developed and progressed, it became apparent that my experience in filmmaking production was clearly assisting the pragmatic implementation of the project. In fact, these skills enabled me to take on the project in the first place. The film and television industry has been operating for decades under a deeply entrenched and historical structure, known as the film value chain model (Finney 2014). This model applies to the various stages inherent in taking an idea (or concept) through its production phases to reach its intended audience. The production processes pathway involves the following stages: conception, development, pre-production, production, post-production, distribution, and marketing. Each stage necessitates actions and plans to move from one stage to the next in the production pipeline, as shown in Finney's (2014, 22) integrated film value chain, which flows like this:



The advent of digital and its ensuing disruption has seen this model evolve into what is known as the 'emerging film value chain' (Finney, 22). This is visualised as:



In describing the emerging film value chain, Finney (2014, 22) says:

It is the potential tightening of the film value chain, whereby the producer is brought much closer to the consumer (and hence the revenue streams being recouped), that is of significant interest. Niche audiences, once able to be tapped and marketed directly, have significant value if able to be reached less expensively.

In our case, the digital archive project was never designed to gain monetary value, simply because of the film materials' nature (as student films and therefore primarily educational in value). However, within this production chain, the digital archive project engendered multiple values from what might be considered as a low impactful set of student films. These include revenue streams that might accrue, such as through the attraction of more excellent students applying to VCA and the utilisation of content in other forms of cultural products. The significance of digital and its tools enabled me as a producer to respond to consumer needs (staff, students, industry) in a greater way.

On reflection, I began the project following the integrated film value chain model, which was, in fact, what I was trained in and was therefore implicit to my practice. However, as I moved through the project, it became a hybrid model whereby I adapted and responded to the environment in which I was working. Finney (2014, 23) supports this approach in independent film praxis, stating that hybrid means that the:

... producers and entrepreneurs in the film space need not only to understand and master traditional and current tools for selling and marketing their films, but also concurrently start designing and working on digital and social media aspects that are growing increasingly critical to finding and winning an audience.

As I applied action research to the research project, I realized that I was following a very similar process of action as to what I would do if I was making a film. This realisation came about when I began identifying standards, projects, and professional literature during the production process. Rather than drawing on standards, processes and expertise to lead a film, in the VCA-DAP, my goal was to steward a sustainable program for the digital archive and its curation. Much of this specialist research in archival science and information technology sits outside of the scope of this thesis because my focus is on articulating a practice-led response to the stages and challenges of producing a digital archive for a film school archive (from a screen producer's perspective). I did however draw on systematic approaches when accessioning, processing, and considering the digital archive project, such as the Digital Curation Centre (DCC) *Curation Lifecycle* model. This model is a graphical representation and overview of each digitization and preservation process stage and sees the process move from conception to realization and suggests an iterative curation cycle (Higgins 2008). This type of model is commonly used in humanities projects (where digital archives often sit). However, as a producer who utilised the film value chain model to visualise and map the process of taking a film concept to consumers, I found this process more conducive to developing and creating a student film archive project.

In *Screen Production Research* (Batty and Kerrigan 2018), Berkeley (34-35) discusses how filmmaking is much more than an efficient operation, stating that; "filmmaking is also an economic, social and collaborative one and cannot be adequately understood independent of that context." Similarly, I found producing a digital archive was reliant on money, time, resources, and people, just like making a film. Each stage of the VCA-DAP was iterative and intrinsically interconnected to the principles underpinning action research and reliant on multiple dependencies, like in filmmaking. Berkeley (2018, 43) also goes on to say:

The stages of pre-production, production and post-production; rushes screenings; test screenings; casting, rehearsal and shooting processes; and behind-the-scenes videos are all methods to incorporate reflection and evaluation into the creative practice being undertaken.

Indeed, the way I approached the production process of the VCA-DAP was through inquiry/action based, explorative, phenomenological, and pragmatic methodologies. Therefore, the ontological basis of my research was constructivist in nature and the methodologies that I used

were aligned to the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical perspectives that I developed throughout the writing and enacting of this research (Kerrigan, Verdon and Aquilia 2018). Further to this, when I located the project inside the domain of screen production research, I discovered that my enquiry into my filmmaking practice was a valid, authentic, and reliable way to conduct research. Through the practice of creating the VCA-DAP, I had automatically been using a process linked to my skills as a producer. Through academic interrogation into the research process, I could tie together the various theoretical and pragmatic approaches that I had used to inform the overall research. In the opinion of Kerrigan (2018, 26):

Screen production research is interdisciplinary, and as an emerging field it uses multiple research methodologies built around the practice of filmmaking and screenwriting as research methods. The progression of the discipline relies on academic rigor and consistency in approaches to research design, which can be strengthened when the broader philosophical ramifications are understood and employed by future researchers.

As Kerrigan states above, the discipline of filmmaking research will be enhanced when researchers, like myself, can argue and defend what appears to be their subjective research position but is, in fact, rigorous professional practice led research. The result of writing this thesis was that I began to value my practice as a producer and discover how I could use my practice to lead the design of research projects.

To conclude this section, the below table offers an insight into the various stages and outcomes of the project, using stages in the integrated film value chain and mapping them to the stages of the archive project, along with detailing the outcomes produced at each stage. It is worth noting that the process was a lot “fuzzier” (Dick 1993) and some stages overlapped throughout the project.

Filmmaking Stage	Archive Project Stage	Outcomes
DEVELOPMENT Idea (Concept)	• Idea triggered • Problem identified within film school setting. • Project need and concern established. • Imagine Project (opportunities) • Scope project (what's in collection, formats) • Budget project • Test project with small part of the collection. • Identify project partners/ stakeholders/ audience – get letter of interest.	• Enrol in masters research project • Complete Significance Assessment and Preservation Needs Assessment to test projects significance and need. • International research trip to research and benchmark project
FINANCING	• Seek funding based on opportunities • Apply for funding	• Received Faculty Investment Grant to coincide with an anniversary celebration of the VCA turning 50 years old (as the longest continuing film school in Australia). • Test Project with digitization of 50 films • Write project proposal documents • Write and submit various grant applications: awarded \$50,000 project funding from Film

		Victoria for digitisation; • awarded \$20,000 for object based seed funding from the University, • awarded \$250,000 from the University for film curation and platform site to release the works.
Production – (involves pre-production)	• Commission digitisation of materials • Prepare materials • Prepare metadata • Films digitized • Magnetic Tapes digitized	• Partner with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) to complete digitization • Partner with Research Platform Services to test digital repository of materials • Create metadata schema • Spreadsheets with film information • Project Guidelines • 500 celluloid films digitized • 1,200 magnetic tapes digitized • Site development for material presentation
Post-Production (involves licensing – making sure we can	• Digital Asset Management (digital repository) • Creation of deliverables	• Films quality controlled

release all the materials)	• Check clearances / contact and liaise with filmmakers.	• Metadata checked and added to • File formats created and added into digital repository • Pipeline sorted for born digital pathway
Marketing Distribution	• Release films on YouTube • Articles written that curate the collection • Engage and activate users • Continue curation and activation of the collection.	• 125 films released on YouTube • 25 articles written to curate the collection based on a variety of themes and topics related to films in the archive • User testing and further access requirements scoped and granted.

3.9 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

This chapter has discussed the processes and methodologies that I undertook to conceive and realise this project. As noted, the research processes and outcomes evolved at each stage in response to the various stages of action and the various needs the project presented. As the project developed, it became clear that I would have to raise money in stages to realise the project. This lengthened the process and meant that I weaved through each of the production phases as things often overlapped to prepare all the materials, including the metadata, to finish the project effectively. It was only through viewing the project and processes retrospectively that I discovered the project's distinct phases and how they aligned to the production processes relevant to filmmaking and its integrated film value chain model.

Utilising action research to critically evaluate my practice deepened my appreciation and insight into how I think and reflect in action. The methodology, therefore, fits with what Denzin and Lincoln (2010) describe as the "new paradigm researcher", stating this as someone who is a:

... "bricoleur" – a maker of quilts or montage, a "Jack of all trades," a kind of professional do-it-yourself person – who is much more likely to deploy a wider range of interpretative/qualitative practices, aimed at understanding and "interrogating" the subject matter at hand, than presenting a highly structured and apparently methodical account of a research situation (quoted in Davis 2007, 10).

The multiple methodologies that I drew on added to the scale, depth, and profundity of the project and the philosophical and conceptual framework of the body as archive / archive as body.

In the next chapter, I examine the project development phase, from idea to concept, through to production. I discuss the strategies applied in the development (foundational) phase of the project and offer insight into how my practice of producing for the screen informed this phase of the project.

CHAPTER 4: PROJECT DEVELOPMENT: FROM CONCEPT TO PRODUCTION

(2014 – 2016)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the strategies applied in the project's foundations, which were necessary for taking the VCA Digital Archive from concept into production. The development stage of a film takes up to seven years, with thousands of dollars and hours required to get a project off the ground (Jeffrey 2006, 121). Rigorous research and collaboration with a wide variety of personnel is required to develop, test, and measure an idea to see if it 1) has value, 2) marketability, 3) feasible budget, 4) appropriate standards of production, and 5) return on investment (Jeffrey 2006, 122-23). The development phase establishes a film/ screen idea within a given market and ultimately justifies the project's value and need. It is the 'why' of the project; the 'why make it?', 'why should we care?' In the case of the VCA digital archive project, it was also an extension of the question explored in various sections of Chapters One and Two, 'why digitise?'.

Fortunately, the development of the digital archive project did not take seven years. After only two years, the project attracted substantial investment to move from its development phase into production. It is tempting to spend this chapter detailing the many steps taken in this phase of the project as there were umpteen dozens of them. However, the purpose of this chapter is to offer the reader insight into how my practice of screen producing informed this phase and the major stages of the project. I will also examine key milestones and achievements related to this part of production.

As touched on throughout this thesis, filmmaking is inherently collaborative and interdisciplinary. Upon commencing this project, I was already adept at drawing on a range of disciplines, fields, skills, and personnel to formulate a project. The digital archive project allowed me to build on these skills as I navigated distinct domains within a complex institutional setting, full of internal politics, agendas, and specialised nomenclature. It amplified my understanding of institutional governance and how change can best happen

when integrated into an institutional strategy with centralised support. By its nature, institutional change is prolonged, and the process belonging to it is fraught with competing deadlines and resources, shifting budgets, and changeable strategies. This is not dissimilar to the screen industry and funding requirements that are mostly linked to government screen agencies, where criteria and remits are continually shifting to meet strategic priorities.

In writing this exegesis, I began to appreciate more deeply how the skills of a screen producer are transferable to a myriad of settings, fuelled by collaborative working methodologies and concepts related to the production of cultural value and significance. Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the first steps of the project was to establish the project's worth, ensuring a strong narrative hook to move forward.

4.1. PROJECT VALUE AND MARKETABILITY

The criterion used by a film festival programmer or sales agent to select film work is based on such things as subject matter, entertainment (engagement) value, aesthetics and production standards, and its marketable features (Jeffrey 2006, 122). The criterion in which to assess an archive's value or worth is somewhat similar. On the advice of a colleague, I recommended to the VCA Film School that they apply to have the audiovisual archive become part of the University of Melbourne's Cultural Collection's Unit. The Unit provides a platform to over thirty collections from diverse academic disciplines such as law, medicine, dentistry, zoology, fine arts, classics, botany and more. The object types within each collection vary per discipline but include rare artefacts, books, medical and dental implants, archives, and paintings. The University draws on the usage of its collections to enhance pedagogy, research, and engagement, yet to date, there had been no University of Melbourne audiovisual cultural collection. The Cultural Collections Unit acknowledged that the VCA Film School moving image archive would fit its criterion, given the heritage and contemporary short film works the collection contained.

To qualify for this status, it involved commissioning a significance assessment report, which tested the archive against a national framework and guide, *Significance 2.0*. In their 2009 guide, Russell and Winkworth (11) state that:

'Significance' refers to the values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities. Significance helps unlock the potential of collections, creating opportunities for communities to access and enjoy collections and understand Australia's history, cultures, and environments.

The report unearthed the potential of the VCA FTV's archive to create local, national, and international impact and value. The Film School already knew of its most saleable elements (namely famous people and films that had gained prestige through film festivals), and it was these elements that it had pushed in its marketing campaigns for the last few decades.

However, the significance assessment offered a different story, and provided a detailed analysis of its historical, cultural, political, aesthetic, social, spiritual, and research value. The findings affirmed the importance of the graduates' voice in shaping and defining contemporary culture. The short film was a vehicle through which students explored their identity and raised concerns about their place in society, enabling them to enter political, social, religious, or intercultural discourse (Horder 2015, 10). Recurring themes in the collection were identified, exploring sexual identity, abuse, family, migration to Australia, gender, politics, refugees, disability, grief, death, and more (Horder 2015, 10).

The assessment recognised the pressing need for digital preservation to commence at once to avoid any further deterioration of the magnetic material or loss of film and confirmed the collection's provenance, uniqueness and representativeness and interpretive capacity. Whilst affirming the need for this project and our archive's significance, the report became the catalyst for the project team to narrate a story as to 'why' the films should be digitised. Once the archive was formally granted the status of being a University of Melbourne Cultural Collection, it opened the doors to wider conversations around the preservation and digitisation needs necessary to realising its full potential.¹⁸

¹⁸ The Film School's Significance Assessment report is available at this link: To access the item, go to <https://doi.org/10.26188/14195939.v1>. It should offer other institutions' stimulus in which to view their own collections.

In addition to this, during this phase, I secured funding via a University of Melbourne professional development funding scheme to undertake a qualitative research trip overseas to benchmark the project against other high profile film schools, archives, and cultural institutions. I desired to understand the market and landscape in which we were operating and investigate the resourcing needed to produce the project adequately.

This trip illuminated key insights into how to approach the project from a pragmatic point of view. Many organisations were scoped, both large and small, and the results indicated that every archival and cultural organisation that I interviewed clearly understood the social and cultural capital of their collections. Consequently, they were investing in systems, procedures, and workflows to enable a broader audience to access their collections via a diverse array of platforms and interfaces.¹⁹

During this study trip, all the film schools interviewed were acutely aware of the pressing need to digitise their magnetic media and film material (from a preservation and access point of view). However, they were struggling to realise their vision due to inadequate finance and resourcing. By moving forward quickly to preserve and provide open access to its long history of audiovisual holdings, I proposed that the VCA Film School had the opportunity to act as an exemplar for other film schools and archives within an institutional setting.

Despite acknowledging the opportunities inherent in the digital age for all organisations, the biggest challenges across the board were to do with resourcing, integrating platforms, data storage, people, and planning. Notwithstanding these hurdles, I wrote a strategic report of my findings from the research trip, asserting that as we live in the information age, coined as 'digital disruption' (Deloitte 2012), digital thinking must then become a core part of an organizational structure. Support from senior leadership was imperative to make this happen. Indeed, at the time of writing that report, the University Digitisation Centre, as part of the University of Melbourne Library, revealed in its *Digitization Policy Report* (2013) that it had an "unsystematic approach to digitization activities," further suggesting that the "organization is

¹⁹ To access this research project report go to <https://doi.org/10.26188/14195939.v1>

at a competitive disadvantage in the sector." ²⁰ It was clear that VCA FTV could be the vanguard for the wider University and the management of its audiovisual assets if it acted now.

My report concluded with the following recommendations for the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music:

1. Investing in the University's digitisation capacity (both equipment and skills) and building a digital preservation structure for its audiovisual assets (using the Film School as its model) would ensure that the University is at the cutting edge of the digital frontier.
2. Investing in a digital asset management system to securely host, store and retrieve audiovisual material and data was necessary to safeguard the audiovisual assets.
3. Digital capability should be built and centralised to ensure that digital is a core part of the overall business structure.
4. Support and/ or investment (via a Faculty cash flow injection or a targeted University grant) would enable the redesign and reimagining of the film school's current *FileMaker Pro* database to standardise metadata related to the films.

The research trip revealed that digital experiences and solutions served to improve audience engagement and satisfied expectations and relevancy in an increasingly competitive online environment.

The value and the marketability of the project were acutely identified through actioning the following:

- Commissioning a significance assessment report to verify and articulate the historical, socio-cultural, political, research and aesthetic significance of the film school archive
- Becoming part of the University of Melbourne's Cultural Collection's Unit
- Benchmarking the project against other film schools and cultural institutions overseas through undertaking a research trip.

²⁰ Centre, U., 2013. *University Digitisation Centre*. [online] Library. Available at: <https://digitisation.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/331369/library_digitisation_policy.pdf> [Accessed 17 May 2013].

4.2 BUDGET REALITY AND ESTABLISHING APPROPRIATE STANDARDS OF PRODUCTION

To fully conceive a screen work, one must ascertain its cost and ensure that it can be made within the appropriate production standards, on time, to budget, and schedule. In the development phase, a producer will spend time breaking down a film script, arranging it into a working schedule based on similar elements (e.g., locations, cast, stunts, etc.), and then commence a budget. The budget is configured through quotes and estimated costs based on industry knowledge and in conversation with experts in various areas related to the budget elements.

In this two year phase of the project, I relied on my production management and producing skills to drive each action stage. This involved countless hours of my time after work and on weekends digging deep into the collection to determine the number of films, formats, length, and other contextual information. I needed to know what we were working with to source an accurate quote for the digitisation. Once we received this, it gave the team a realistic sense of what it would take to move into production.²¹

Another fundamental part of the development stage is to know your audience and how the project will reach them (e.g., through means of distribution and the screening platform). In our case, we were dealing with web based digital materials, but we needed to ensure that we had a preservation copy of the film (for archival purposes), an exhibition copy (for cinema screenings), and an access copy (web version of the film).²² Also, important to this phase is understanding the complex variables at play with the digitisation process, including file naming conventions, quality controlling all the films (which involved volunteers watching each digitised version of the films for technical dropouts and other errors that might occur during the digitisation process). There was also the need to consider bandwidth, storage, and data processing requirements. My filmmaking background meant that I understood the need to be across the technical requirements of a project and its workflow. These aspects of a film project impact the budget and the same could be said for a digital archive project. In the case of a film,

²¹ The digitisation quote came in at AUD 230,000 for 1,700 films on hybrid media, including celluloid film and magnetic tape-based media.

²² At the time of writing this dissertation, the future proof digital version of a film, known as the preservation copy, is a JPEG2000 format. However, the mezzanine (exhibition) and web (access) versions shifted from DVCPRO in the development stage to Pro Res 422 in the production stage, along with outputs of a H264 streaming copy at 10Mbps and 3Mbps. These digital versions are still evolving and are not seen as stable, long-term formats. It is anticipated the lifespan of these digital versions could be 10 years, but as new technological formats and systems evolve, the formats may need to be reformatted.

the camera and audio settings decided upon for filming impact post-production flow and may affect the project's delivery if all processes are not in sync with one another. For a digital archive project, I learnt that different systems and interfaces (such as YouTube) require certain file types to stream and that multiple versions were necessary for different purposes.

One way to figure out the best course of action in making a film is to spend some of the development period testing ideas and processes. This could be filming what is known as 'proof of concept' material or short scenes to exemplify key aesthetics and artistic styles. In late 2015, the VCA-DAP attracted AUD 50,000 of project funding from the Dean of the Faculty, which was to strategically coincide with the Film School's upcoming 50th anniversary (held in 2016), celebrating the milestone of being the longest continuing film school in Australia.

This money was intended to aid the digitisation of 50 films, which would be chosen based on the following criteria: famous filmmakers, award-winning/ festival favourite films, and films that possessed cultural, aesthetic, research, historical, and social significance. These films were to be picked by staff and alumni and released on our very own branded YouTube channel. This event became a key milestone for the project. The initial project evolved into several subprojects successfully realised. The project and steps are available to view here: <https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/digital-archive/our-story>.

This part of the project brought together volunteers from the University of Melbourne Cultural Collections Placement Program, the Film School staff to write about the films chosen and writers and filmmakers from the industry to curate the collection through themed 'decade' focused articles. These activities and partnerships highlighted the increasing significance and value of the films, the Film School, and the digital archive project.²³ The 50th Anniversary enlivened and shaped the next phase of the project as staff and students began to reflect on the importance and worth of the films, the history within the film school and how the project could meaningfully contribute to its overall and continuing reputation, along with its potential to enhance pedagogy, research and engagement.

The digitisation aspect related to this part of the project was outsourced to a reputable company, DAMsmart, and the huge and daunting task of digitising the rest of the collection (1,700 films)

²³ The reader may be interested in the following press release to find out more about this significant event: <https://about.unimelb.edu.au/newsroom/news/2016/may/vca-releases-50-films-for-film-and-televisions-golden-anniversary>

began to reveal itself. The need for momentum was high, as emphasised by Jeffrey (2016, 125) who talks about the role of the producer on a production:

Push, push, push. Everything will stop if you do not provide forward movement. Schedule everything. Keep people informed by memo or email. Make sure you have the time to devote to this new project.

These industry words rang in my head. I had firmly established the project's need, value, and articulated the vision, so I felt driven to keep pushing things forward. The 50th Anniversary and digitisation of the first 50 films marked a big first step in the project gaining credibility and traction within the wider University and screen production industry, but we were still a long way off raising more money to fund the digitisation and curation for the rest of the collection. Alongside this testing phase, the former Head of Film and Television, Nicolette Freeman, and I spent many hours working on funding applications and establishing connections to move into the larger scale digitisation and preservation project.

4.3 RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI): *SHOW ME THE MONEY*

"Once you've established how you'll raise the finance, you need to consider how to maximise the film's potential returns" (Jeffrey 2016, 177).

The Australian film industry relies primarily on federal funding to support its financial structure in making films. Although a return on investment (ROI) is desirable and attractive, the film business's reality is that it is rare for a film to move into commercial profit until investors and other related sales and distribution costs are recouped. Therefore, the economic outcomes and commercial validation of screen products may be best viewed through the lens of direct impacts associated with film production - jobs, income, tourism, regional reputation, and impact of creativity in its associated economic dynamics (Ryan et al., 2014). The cultural value of screen content has long been considered a value proposition that moves beyond economic imperative (Ryan et al., 2014). This links directly into the historical, community, sociocultural, political, and aesthetic value of the VCA film archive. As a permanent record and archive, it informs, enriches, and enlivens discourse around contemporary moving image culture. The networked nature of a digital archive means that it can transcend globally for even greater impact.

As the archive's films were made by students, this suggested the project best position itself within conversations of cultural and historical heritage and value, rather than economic/monetary gains. Any investment in the project was to be by way of grants, so non recoupable and ongoing investment would need to be available within the institution in recognition of the archive's value for the institution, its students, and researchers.

By ensuring that our archive's vision became tied into the Film School's identity, the wider Faculty, and University, along with forging a national moving image identity, the digital archive served to be transformative in its design and thinking. The individual identities within the digital archive are fragments that form cultural and institutional memory. This is like how McKemmish (1996, 29) describes personal recordkeeping, stating:

On a personal level [a personal record] is a way of evidencing and memorializing our lives; our existence, our activities, and experiences, our relationships with others, our identity, our 'place' in the world.

The films and their associated artefacts, seen as personalised memory fragments, therefore coexist in complex networked associations. To put a human face on this, one example is an email I received from an alumnus who went to VCA film school in the 1990s. He wanted to obtain a version of his student film to show his son for nostalgic purposes. This was a lovely example of how personal memories (films) were stored in the archive and acted as a memorial of part of someone's life.

The actions and steps (or strategies) taken in the development period signify several important affordances that show the cultural value of digital heritage and preservation projects. The action steps and strategies that were taken included:

- Students and staff opportunities to explore and reflect on the Film School and its research, engagement, and pedagogical value.
- Messages of *cultural memory* and *audio-visual memory* embedded in staff conversations in teaching and learning. The growth of these conversations reinforced the role that institutions can serve in protecting our audiovisual and cultural history. This reinvigorated the connections made to the films when staff wrote about the first 50 films and why they thought they should be part of the first 50 films digitised. The significance of the films was then articulated by staff and now appears in the metadata

attached to the films on the VCA Film Schools own YouTube chanel. Readers can access the full playlist here:

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZvuHN64oDm4dxNinExtBQnTGb5FgiBCk>

- Values of digital stewardship and collective institutional responsibility were strengthened through the 50th Anniversary and the articles being released in association with the collection. These values were continually articulated in conversation and writing around the archive during this period.
- The film school received an AUD 50,000 digitisation investment grant from state screen funding agency, Film Victoria, to digitise and preserve the collection's celluloid material. A partnership was entered with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image to complete this work at a low-cost rate, based on strategic partnership objectives that were mutually beneficial.
- The 50th Anniversary offered focus and motivation for the larger project to be undertaken and highlighted its magnitude.

In summary, staff, students, and the wider industry showed a high level of interest and involvement throughout the varying activities associated with the 50th Anniversary and wider digital archive project. There were engagement activities, from interviews with past filmmakers to tours of the film school, a garage sale of old equipment and film reels, activation of alumni connection, a massive party, a trailer edited for the project, digitisation of still images related to the films, amongst other things. Overall, this phase of development resulted in a huge engagement success, which built cultural capacity and led to continued momentum with the project.

4.4 DEVELOPING MY IDENTITY WITHIN THE PROJECT

During this time, the literature that I drew on was copious, touching on conversations about digital preservation, audiovisual film school memory, technical standards, and the rhizomatic/phenomenological structure of the body as archive/ archive as body. I began to write about the project and reflect on my own experience as a maker. This was my first foray into drawing on a feminist self reflexive autoethnographic approach, and the "doing" of the project became synonymous with the process of self reflection .

I published an article in the University of Melbourne's Cultural Collection magazine detailing the project and its significance. From there, I began to reflect on my own experiences with the moving image. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this article led to an invitation to write for the online academic news publication, *The Conversation*, as a response to the news that VHS players were no longer being manufactured, rendering the format obsolete. I chose to write a love letter to the VHS tape:

One day I decided it was time to transfer you to DVD. I was worried you wouldn't be there, but you were – as tough as ever. This time the playback decks were good and I could still hear the badly recorded dialogue in "Reigning Terror". I sat watching my work from 16 to 19 years old – a true blast from the past. It had been years since I had seen you. The images spoke of an unconscious grappling with the trauma I was now working on in therapy. I was using you as an early recovery tool; a healing tool – albeit clumsily. I skipped to the collection I was now embarking on digitising. What made these films unique and worth salvaging? Were the makers like me? Did they use the moving image to convey their unknown truths or secrets? Did they know it at the time? Was the question of knowing your audience too abstract at such a young age? (Lyon 2016).

Unbeknownst to me, I was beginning to embody the archive through reflexively and creatively producing content about the project. I became both part of the research and the audience. My practice developed as I interacted with the archive-body, suggesting I was playing out an unconscious repertoire, like what Knudsen (2016, 72) had articulated:

Both archive and repertoire, body-archive and archive-body exist simultaneously in past, present and future. The content is past, it is remembered, recalled and evaluated from the present, and it affects how one deals with the future.

This reinforced my thinking of the digital archive as a living archive, as I was able to bring to "life" my thinking around how the archive could be reinterpreted and reimagined in others' writing (through the 50th Anniversary collection) and now in my writing. A phenomenological transfer of memories began to occur - from my body-archive to the project's body-archive; through my archive-body ("*...my behaviours connecting my experienced body to the world.*" Knudsen 2016, 71) to the project's archive-body, culminating in the development of a generative praxis.

4.5 DEVELOPMENTAL HELL: CHALLENGES IN PRODUCING A DIGITAL ARCHIVE PROJECT

Although the development period was marked by much optimism and many opportunities arose from the actions taken, the process revealed a large limitation in the project and its design that I struggled to overcome. This was to do with the overall resourcing, which impacted time, budget, and the project's schedule. The project was never adequately resourced due to a lack of full institutional funding and support. This meant that each stage needed to be approached piecemeal. Whilst starting small had its benefits, if more resourcing had been in place, this would have enabled the project to be finished sooner, and staff (including myself) to not feel so "burnt out." Perhaps this speaks to a tension in the struggle to adequately finance the arts, whereby much time and effort is spent on "selling" a project's artistic or cultural worth, rather than stakeholders being able to intrinsically see the value upfront, therefore, invest in the project. This supports research findings on the producer's motivation, whereby "the creative vision is more powerful than the money" (Spicer et al. 2014, 139). It also shows the lack of critical orientation that can subsequently ensue.

Because of this inherent struggle between resourcing and project vision, there was little opportunity to provide a professional development opportunity for staff inside the organisation to learn about digital preservation. There was no chance to discuss and develop concepts and pedagogical and research strategies for long-term sustainability. As a researcher, this impacted the project. I developed a strategic approach to the best of my ability, but I discovered that without University stakeholder and institutional support, then our audio-visual collection was still vulnerable. Time was another key factor at play here, and the project tasks felt very rushed and overwhelming. The project was so large that it needed a bigger team to manage it. Nevertheless, settling into project as both producer and researcher, I found myself wearing multiple hats, which, in retrospect, should have been outsourced to others. At times, I lacked the energy during this first phase to reflect properly as it was very much "plan and do," with deadlines pushing things along into each new step. The "doing" lasted a lot longer than I had initially imagined, and I had no built-in time to reflect and consider this phase. On reading the theories of Dewey (1938) and Schon (1993, 1991), I was later able to reframe this as "*doing in action*" and "*knowing in action*," which became clearer as I articulated my methodology in the writing of this thesis.

4.6 PROJECT TESTING: PROOF OF CONCEPT

In section 4.2, I described how the 50th Anniversary was used as way of testing the digitisation workflow. The VCA Digital Archive Project had so many elements to it, that it was necessary to apply this same method to the structure of the metadata. Refined, standardised and sophisticated metadata would result in the audiovisual collection being searchable and meaningful for future research and data mining and for historical purposes. One of the suggestions gleaned from my research trip had recommended the faculty support the redesign and reimagining of the film school's *FileMaker Pro* database system to assist in standardising the metadata related to the collection of films. This work would enable us to move more readily into the access phase, so that audiences could engage with the films in the archive.

In 2016-17, I was awarded an Engagement Initiative Grant to work with a developer who had a strong reputation in the moving image archive milieu. This was the first step in restructuring our filmographic metadata (the production and technical information to contextualise the work) to create a functional and engaging taxonomy of metadata belonging to a film school. In short, before establishing the archive, the Film School used a database to manage its student film productions, implemented in *FileMaker Pro* in the late 1990s by a non-specialist designer, with various page layout designs to hold limited data about the filmmakers and their films, as seen in Figures 4-6.

BIG SISTER (830S-FILEMAKER1)

1 / 2419 Found (Unsorted)

Records Show All New Record Delete Record Find Sort

Layout: BFTV1 Production View As: Preview Edit Layout

BFTV1 MAIN PRODUCTION

TITLE **RUN**

FIRST NAME **YNE** SURNAME **N**

COURSE **BFAFTV2** YEAR GRADUATED **2017**

SYNOPSIS

Kyah seeks revenge for her best friend

TECHNICAL DETAILS

FORMAT SHOT ON **DIGITAL** B & W or COLOUR **COLOUR**

FORMAT FINISHED ON **XD CAM** RATIO **16:9**

LENGTH IN MINS **3:40** GENRE **DRAMA, ACTION**

SUBJECT/THEME **WOMEN, SAFETY**

CREW & CAST

VCA SUP PROD **P** ART DIRECTOR

VCA STUD PROD **ASNE** LIGHTING **ASNE**

MUSIC (COMPOSER) **B** D.O.P. **W**

SOUND **ASNE** CAMERA OP. **W**

EDITOR **ASNE**

OTHER KEY CREW

CAST

ASNE AS "KYAH"

ASNE AS "BEST FRIEND"

W AS "ATTACKER"

BACK TO MAIN

100 Browse

FIGURE 4 THIS TABLE SHOWS THE ORIGINAL FILEMAKER PRO DATABASE THAT HELD INFORMATION RELATING TO THE STUDENT'S SHORT FILM, MADE AT SECOND YEAR UNDERGRADUATE YEAR LEVEL.

TITLE	THIS MARCHING GIRL THING		
FIRST NAME	[REDACTED]	SURNAME	[REDACTED]
COURSE	B	YEAR GRADUATED	1994
SYNOPSIS	CENSOR SYNOPSIS indy is a baton twirler with the Southern Twirlettes... Make-up... hair... leotards... sequins and stockings... she looks... like she fits in... She's just beginning to feel like she doesn't.		
FORMAT SHOT ON	16MM FILM	B & W or COLOUR	COLOUR
FORMAT FINISHED ON	16MM FILM	RATIO	NORMAL
LENGTH IN MINS	20 MINS	GENRE	NARRATIVE
SUBJECT/THEME			
VCA SUP PROD		D.O.P.	DAVID RICHARDSON
VCA STUD PROD		CAMERA OP.	DAVID RICHARDSON AND
MUSIC (COMPOSER)	ROSE [REDACTED]	DIALOGUE	
SOUND	VINCE [REDACTED]	D LANGUAGE	
EDITOR	CINDY	SUBTITLES Y/N	
ART DIRECTOR	SIX DESIGNS - DENISE	S LANGUAGE	
LIGHTING	DAVID RICHARDSON		
OTHER KEY CREW			

Non-standardised metadata includes length of film, e.g., this could be written as '20' or '20 MINS' and format could be written in multiple ways. Ratio gives no options and is open to interpretation.

FIGURE 5 THIS SCREENSHOT ILLUSTRATES THE OLD FILEMAKER PRO DATABASE, FEATURING INFORMATION PERTAINING TO A GRADUATE FILM. IT SHOWS THE BASIC AND NON-STANDARDISED METADATA THAT THE FILM SCHOOL CAPTURED.

FIGURE 6 THIS SCREENSHOT SHOWS ONE OF THE PAGE LAYOUTS IN THE OLD FILENAKER DATABASE, USED TO CAPTURE INFORMATION RELATED TO THE STUDENTS, ACTING AS A STUDENT LEDGER TO HOLD STUDENT RECORD INFORMATION.

The purpose of the grant was threefold:

1. To redesign the database to aid in the administration of the students and the films they made;
2. To conduct an inventory of the archive numbers attached to the master copy of the student films and;
3. To develop a searchable database to view web-based copies of the films via a private Vimeo or YouTube link (for those films that were available through this means).

The grant enabled us to draw on the expertise of the collections management database solutionist to redesign the database into a relational structure. This would feature detailed and controlled filmographic metadata, descriptive terms, stills from the production, a link to an online streaming file, and standardisation of the fields designed to indicate which course requirements the production was linked to.

This properly modelled relational structure would enable precise searches for staff and students to explore the collection. This included indexing student lists and film production master lists, which could be sorted and grouped by various criteria (year, subject matter, format, etc.) as seen in the illustration below.

VCA:Final Copy (FileMaker Server 15)

File Edit View Insert Format Records Scripts Window Help

Records 3876 Total (Unsorted) Show All New Record Delete Record Find Sort Share

Layout: Films View As: Preview

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Students Films Film List

Marbles: A Game

Graduating Film of Jon Quinn 1967

Director Jon Quinn Also known as... John Quinn

Alternate Film Titles Alt Title

Technical Storage Descriptive Production Contributors Releases Stills

Caption

Still Image (Drag & Drop)

This video is private

Enter password Submit

<https://vimeo.com/208234418>

Synopsis Password: Vcaftv1 Schoolboys explain the ins and outs of playing marbles.

Genres Documentary Children Games Education

Themes

The tabs above enable the user to enter and view the technical, storage and descriptive metadata, including all contributors and release form information and drag and drop stills images.

On the right, the user enters their synopsis, genre (standardised fields) and themes (standardised). A link to a digital copy of the film can also be listed here, which will be embedded in the window.

FIGURE 7 THIS SCREENSHOT FEATURES THE REDESIGNED DATABASE, HIGHLIGHTING THE RELATIONAL AND INTEGRATED FUNCTIONALITY OF THE ARCHIVE IN CONTRAST TO THE EARLIER DESIGN.

As seen above, an important part of this redesign was creating controlled vocabularies for many of the descriptive fields in keeping with best metadata practices for moving image archives. The employment of appropriate field types (pop-up menus, checkboxes) enforced these limited options. This enabled the student to enter metadata related to their film, rather than having this task performed by the Screen Production Coordinator (my previous position). Before this, students submitted their production metadata on a document which listed the relevant fields to fill out. The staff member (me, at one point), then copied these into the old FileMaker Pro database for each film (up to 100 a year, as the database did not capture first year undergraduate works). This took copious hours and as mentioned earlier, the metadata was completed in an ad hoc way and often lacked depth. This new database enabled students to enter their own metadata, which was more complex, capturing details that had not been required before, such as locations, settings and clearance information. This gave students an implicit and explicit contextualisation of their work, positioning it within a broader remit of artistic and moving image practice.

Whilst the new database might have seemed like a simple and compelling solution, *FileMaker Pro* is not a preservation or asset management site; rather it is an advanced database, perhaps best suited for the presentation and management of text and image-based information. This limited functionality meant it was never a long-term sustainable preservation and access solution for the archive holdings. This seed funding acted as a proof of concept for the larger scale project, offering important learnings regarding the structuring of the metadata, along with highlighting fresh possibilities to explore and interact with the archive (beyond our initial vision) for teaching, learning, and research purposes. We acquitted this part of the project in 2016, and as we moved into the production of the archive itself, the work done in the development period revealed the technical demands of the larger scale project, including complex file formats and codecs hierarchy of metadata and storage and bandwidth requirements. A looming question remained, how to store the audiovisual assets effectively and safely for long term preservation. The answer to this was to come right at the end of the development period.

4.7 SUMMARY COMMENTS ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT PHASE

The research and engagement outcomes developed from the 50th Anniversary added value to the project through the active involvement of Film School staff. This involvement extended through to a wider engagement with the industry. As a researcher facilitator, I sought to understand and scope the materials that belonged to the Film School and learn about the existing archival practices in the Film School. I wanted to use this knowledge to expand my knowledge about digital preservation to develop the digital archive project to streamline the processes more effectively. Because of my background in screen producing, I implicitly considered the project through the film value chain process, which meant ensuring there was a solid long-term vision, project worth and marketability. I then applied an action research/filmmaking methodology to ensure the project could be implemented within a given time frame and resources – albeit within a low budget / independent style of filmmaking (which often sees the producer and lead filmmakers driving many, if not most, of the project elements due to insufficient resourcing).

Through scoping and analysing the outcomes developed in this period and evaluating against key characteristics of digital preservation obtained from the literature review, I derived two successful project elements. The first was in developing a story that showed the richness of the student film collection and its social, historical, and cultural value. This story included the collection's potential to intersect with a broad range of industries and audiences. The VCA-DAP facilitated conversations between the past, present, and the future and connected with graduate students whose films had further meaning beyond their original purpose (i.e., as a curriculum based film school project).

Secondly, the project outcomes showed that a range of activities supported some of the staff and students' learning *in* and *about* digital preservation. This did not necessarily extend to the pragmatics of what was involved, as the actual technical work was outsourced, but it did extend to a philosophical understanding about the need for digital preservation and preserving our audiovisual cultural memory. I realised our project would not necessarily be an exemplar in digital preservation practice, simply because this was not the film school's core business, but what it could be was an exemplar of grassroots (or community based)

digital preservation within a film school setting. This followed a similar vein to my independent filmmaking career trajectory – where I was adept at producing successful films with low budgets and minimal resourcing. Furthermore, inserting myself into the research through writing articles related to the project encouraged me to deepen my practice reflectively and intuitively as a producer, educator, and arts practitioner.

4.8 PROPOSITIONS ABOUT FACILITATING A DIGITAL ARCHIVE IN A FILM SCHOOL SETTING

As I began to develop my thinking around producing a digital archive and conducting research in a film school and institutional setting, I formulated six propositions for other researchers to consider if and when looking to pursue a project like this.

Proposition 1: Know *why*? Develop a deep understanding of the context.

It is important to develop both broad and targeted potentialities and purposes of a digital archive project. This includes gaining knowledge of the collection's history, significance, and the current processes and understandings inherent in the institution. Also, identifying the unique aspects of the collection (e.g., drawing on specific examples) and how they intersect in various settings can increase the potential of the collection. This knowledge can already exist within an institutional setting. However, to effectively build a digital archive project, it is necessary to engage in regular contact and meetings and draw on various data sources and people to identify what challenges, opportunities, and affordances may emerge.

Proposition 2: Understand internal relationships and power structures within the setting.

Knowledge must be gained about the internal relationships and power structures within the setting to obtain diverse perspectives. The varied leadership and collaboration styles of stakeholders will influence other relationships within your operating setting. Spending an extended time in a setting helps understand the types of personal and professional relationships at play and how they might contribute to or block change, project vision, and innovation.

Proposition 3: Develop relationships built on trust, mutuality, and respect.

The researcher benefits the most when they get to know the people they will be collaborating with regularly. Consistent face to face communication, staff meetings, and email correspondence were effective ways to establish relationships. Following through on meeting tasks, keeping to deadlines, and scheduling regular appointments further contributed to a sense

of trust and respect. At times, it was important for me to involve myself in various activities that went alongside aspects of the project. This included various archive related events, records management meetings, library research events, and other faculty related activities. By committing time and energy to these things, I built trust and a sense of mutuality and respect. Members of the university and industry saw that I was actively involved and giving time and energy, which helped grow the relationships. This type of active participation cannot be underestimated. Along with building knowledge, it also forged connections that eventually became stronger when the project went through its difficult patches.

Proposition 4: Understand the biases, preferences and conceptual frameworks at play within the decision making matrix.

Learning about the various theories and challenges within a digital archive project helps build new knowledge about digital preservation and its impact on research, pedagogy and audience engagement. Applying the strategy of Action Research suggests this knowledge is gained from a variety of techniques, such as observation and reflection. Each moment that is understood offers new purpose and direction to the development and iteration of the project's next steps. A digital archive project connects with many disciplines, so the need to have empathy with the way practitioners work and intersect within often complex and diverse fields, each with competing demands and needs, is vital in constructing a culture of trust, rapport, and respect inherent in creating a digital archive project.

Proposition 5: Expect clarity and confusion to arise

Deep understandings about the working nature of the environment you are in and the people and processes develop slowly. Through the researcher's interactions, observations, and meetings, this happens, and naturally, there are periods of miscommunication, confusion, and differences of opinions. These "diversions" will often result in clarity so long as there is a willingness for both parties to agree to work towards the end goal. The researcher and participants must adopt an attitude of flexibility and responsiveness to the changing landscape inherent to a digital archive project, particularly within an action research framework. Digital technology, by its very nature, involves "action," and within that, a level of motivation and agility should be embraced. The researcher can assist in building momentum through regular communication and setting and completing small tasks.

Proposition 6: Value the need for leadership in action research and project management.

Confusion about leadership can result in apathy and or a lack of focus within a project. By considering and identifying aspects of leadership necessary to the success and sustainability, these difficult aspects of a project can be prevented. Clearly defined boundaries within a project can assist in driving forward phases of a project. However, by adopting deep reflective practices, the researcher might find that adopting new leadership and/ or facilitation styles can streamline processes, particularly in large projects. The researcher must learn how to balance their time and energy within a project, as they deepen their understanding of the context of the practice, along with developing processes and relationships, as well as taking time to critically reflect on their working practices, develop a personal theory and continue to drive each phase of the project. If I had a greater sense of my value as a producer at the start of this research process, I would have set firmer boundaries and processes in the overall project framework. A more reflective process could have ensued as I observed my process more acutely at the moment, rather than retrospectively.

These findings show how my thinking moved beyond the film school's immediate context to a broader theorising level, situating the research within a wider context of institutional thinking and practice. Evaluating scope, setting, phase, decision processes, leadership, and stakeholder management affect the opportunities to incorporate sustainability into the project, and therefore knowing these propositions earlier could influence any digital archive project's efficacy.

4.9 PROJECT GREENLIGHT AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

The development phase ended in 2016 with some surprisingly good news. On Christmas Eve, I received a phone call stating that the project had successfully been awarded an AUD 250,000 grant from the University's Student Services Amenities Funding stream. With the aid of the former head of the film school, Nicolette Freeman, I had put in for the grant to curate the student film archive and 'release' the films back to the students via a publicly curated online portal. From 2017 to 2019, the project moved into its production phase. I built into the timeline another research period, and development with a digital company focused on onsite design applying user centred design techniques. Although the development period had revealed clear processes around approaching digitisation and metadata, there were still questions unanswered about storing and retrieving the films (assets) digitally and the collection's long term preservation strategy.

Simultaneously, as the project greenlight happened, we also discovered that the University did indeed have a digital asset management system (or digital repository), known as Mediaflux and owned by a Melbourne based company Arcitecta. This was held within one of the University's departments, Research Platform Services, and meant that we could now find a home for the digital assets once they were digitised. Although monumental itself, the end of this development period meant there was no time to rest, and it was full steam ahead into the next phase of the project: production.

This chapter sought to examine the strategies applied in the development phase of the VCA digital archive project. I discussed the stages of development aligned with taking this project from concept into production and examined key milestone and achievements linked to this important phase of the project. In the next chapter, I will be discussing the practical steps involved in the production of the digital archive project, right through to the dissemination of the films through the archive and other digital platforms.

CHAPTER 5: PRODUCTION THROUGH TO RELEASE (2017 TO 2019)

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter examined the strategies applied in the development (foundational) phase of the project. This chapter will describe the digital archive portal and how I went about producing it, moving from the development stage to production through to marketing/distribution. Before a screen project moves into production, there is an often-lengthy pre-production period, whereby the many elements involved in the film are broken down, resourced and structured so that an actionable plan can be implemented.

Therefore, in each section of this chapter, I will explore the practical elements of each stage in the ‘making of’ this digital archive. I will discuss and / or show through captioned figures, the interface of the Digital Archive; what was done, how it was achieved, and the rationale for each stage within the framework of the theory of production. The nature of this chapter is to describe and illustrate the processes and steps taken to establish how the digital archive ultimately contributes to new knowledge in practice.

Firstly, I will map the stages of a film to the digital archive project, to show the reader the process and framework in which I applied to producing the digital archive. Then, I will move into a practical analysis of the preproduction period, highlighting the lessons learnt at this stage. This will be followed by an overview of the production workflow (related to the digitisation of the material). Then I will explore the post-production phase and visually walk the reader through the digital archive portal, which highlights the creative constituents of this research project. Finally, I will detail the stages involved in the distribution and marketing of the digital archive, whereby each of the various elements were brought together into a cohesive vision and accessible platform, featuring (at that stage) 1,700 short film works. Each section will conclude with a summary of lessons learnt, to assist others who might be considering producing a digital archive for their film school collection.

5.1 MAPPING THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE PROJECT TO THE PROCESS OF MAKING A FILM

In this section, I provide a table that maps the steps I undertook in the full production phase of the digital archive project (right through to marketing/ distribution) and how they correlate

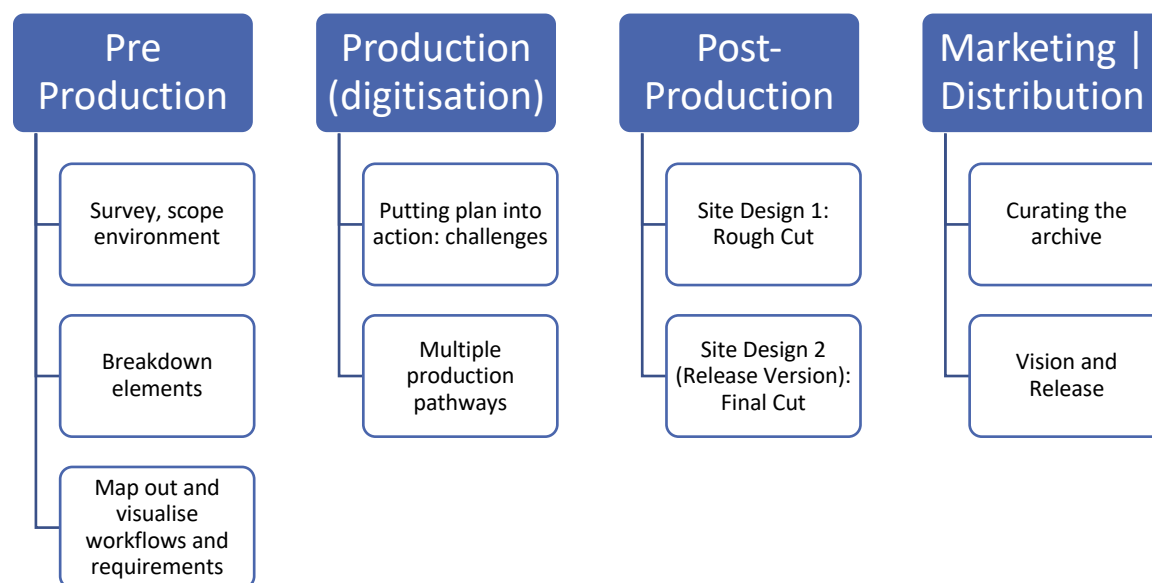
to making a film. I have taken creative license during the production/ filming stage, given the material we were working with was already completed. The post-production phase on its own is far too dense to not consider the digitisation of the materials as a separate (but interconnected) phase – as you would with a film shoot. For example, what is filmed each day on a film shoot must be processed quickly and usually overlaps with the film's daily shooting. The 'stock' (or data) must be checked after each day of filming and the shots or scenes ingested into the edit suite followed by a rough compile so that the production company knows they are on track with how they are realising the story (project's) vision. Through this framework of a theory of production (the film value chain model), I began to see how producing the digital archive project could be aligned with the stages I would apply when producing a film.

Digital Archive Project	Making a Film
Pre-Production	
Survey project requirements	Breakdown of script and requirements for each area
Draft and finalise digitisation guidelines	Draft and finalise production guidelines Contracting
Enlist volunteers and assemble project collaborators/ partners	Set up production office Assemble creative team and crew
Calendar schedule and draft project schedules and milestones	Calendar schedule and draft shooting schedules
Visualisation documents (imagining the archive)	Storyboards, mood boards, style guides, location breakdowns, maps
Project meetings	Production meetings
Create metadata schema	Create shotlists, callsheets etc
Map out pipeline / workflow / testing	Map out pipeline/ workflow/ testing
Production	
Digitising Material (celluloid and magnetic media)	Filming Material (putting plan into action)
Refining structured metadata	Filming and production reports to ensure all information and records are correct for later referral in post-production
Create file formats	Daily assembly edit of rushes

Post-Production	
Ingest into digital asset management system and crosscheck / add to metadata	Ingest into editing system and compile footage
Quality controlling digitised films	Quality controlling filmed material
Implement pipeline / workflow / testing	Editing
Ensure archiving principles are adhered to: 1. Technological choices 2. Data back up and redundancy 3. Relationships defined (student/graduate) 4. Sustainability (economics resourcing)	Ensure archiving principles are adhered to: 1. Technological choices 2. Data back up and redundancy 3. Creative decisions made in editing (how footage / story is compiled) 4. Sustainability (economics resourcing)
Refine different formats and access requirements	Prepare materials and deliverables
Site design 1. Prototype	Rough Cut. Seek feedback Audience testing.
Site Design 2. Product Release (iteration 1) Finish design/ development of relational database (repository) where students can deposit their work, search, curate collections, then the material could be mapped to other university wide systems for engagement opportunities etc.	Finish editing of film (Approvals process) 'Fine Cut'.
Marketing	
Articles written to curate the collection	Preparing material for its release (websites/ press kits/ marketing info)
Interviews, media releases	Interviews, media releases
Distribution Release	
Platform Release: the digital archive site	Film Festivals Premieres
Films selected are released on YouTube for further public engagement	Theatrical VOD SVOD Digital release

Digital Archive Exhibition at Old Quad	Showcase opportunities ancillary exhibition etc.
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Due to the density of each period, which takes us right through to marketing and distribution (release), the above table can be represented in a simplified table format, as pictured below. In the subsequent four sections, I will be focusing on each of these areas in more detail.



5.2 PRE-PRODUCTION: AN INTERPLAY BETWEEN THE CREATIVE AND LOGISTICAL.

In discussing the stages of production, Catherine Gough-Brady (2019, 7) describes the way she approaches pre-production, stating it is “...largely focused on gaining access to people and locations (the logistics) in combination with thinking about what I might say through the film (the scripting), and technically how I might do that (the mechanics).” This is very similar to the approach that I took during this stage. Pre-production on a film involves endless tasks and requirements, so my focus is on three key stages pertinent to this phase: surveying and scoping the environments, breaking down the elements of the project and mapping out workflows.

Pre-production on any film requires collaboration with a multitude of specialist personnel. In the case of the digital archive project, these processes were developed in conjunction with the expertise of the film school post-production coordinator, Gordon Lyon; then head of film school, Nicolette Freeman; data solution consultants from Research Platform Services (RPS)

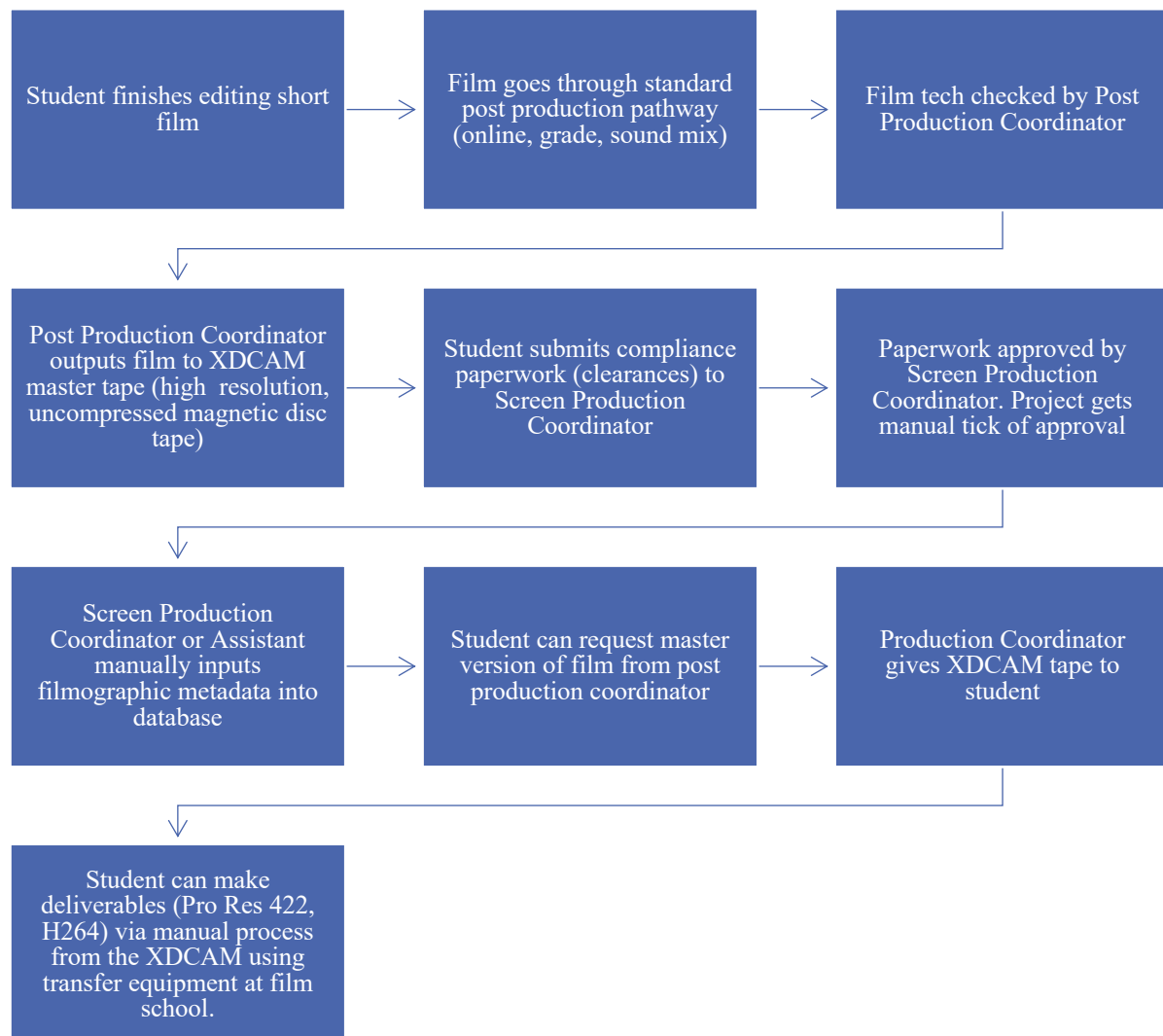
at the University of Melbourne; Dr. Neil Killeen and Jared Winton, members from the Australian National Data Service (ANDS) and computer scientist and founder of Arcitecta, Jason Lohrey. Arcitecta licenses the digital asset management system, Mediaflux, to RPS, which became the data solution system used to preserve, access, and curate the films in our archive.

To briefly establish this context, I met with consultants from RPS in the development phase of the project (mid-2016) to explore our films' storage in Mediaflux. At the time, the system was predominantly used to house STEM-based data. Mediaflux always had the capacity to store audiovisual data but had not yet been used this way. This collaboration, although central to the realisation of this project, is far outside of the scope of this thesis. However, the initial collaboration was forged to trial the storage and workflow related to the 50 films digitised during the VCA FTV's 50th anniversary. As things progressed, the collaboration revealed the benefits of using a system integrated within the University in terms of assisting process, procedure and working towards the sustainability of the collection. An initial grant from the Australia National Data Service in collaboration with RPS and commercial partner Arcitecta, enabled an operable metadata schema and simple visual interface to be designed, in which to store and retrieve the audiovisual assets (see figures 13, 14 and 15). The sizeable grant received at the end of the development period in 2016, from the University's Student Services Amenities Fund meant that further funds could be spent on enhancing the interface and site functionality, through which to enter metadata, upload/link to files and retrieve the audiovisual assets.

The team came together on several occasions in 2017 in a series of workshops and discussions to scope the requirements (the items to be stored in the archive, the user requirements and the desired functions of the interface – e.g., what we wanted it to do). The Student Services Amenities Funding grant allowed us to reimagine Mediaflux further and enable it to be the primary system to store, preserve, curate, and access over 1,700 films (and growing), with some films dating all the way back to 1966. The following three steps pertinent to the pre-production period, describe and illustrate the processes and steps taken to establish the model of the digital archive interface.

Step 1. Survey, Scope Environment

The digital archive project aimed to preserve, access, and curate the films in the VCA Film and Television archive. To achieve this, I needed to understand the current post-production practice at the film school to work out the stages involved in mastering and finalising student short films. The process of this is described in the following flowchart:



Step 2: Breakdown Project Elements

I then began to identify and breakdown the elements involved in each of the above steps, so that each item to be stored in the digital archive system could be considered. These items are listed below and highlight the intricacies of the project and the pathways to be mapped out.

Item	Digital formats to be stored	Number of items
Short Film	JPEG2000 (preservation) Pro Res 422 (high resolution screening version) H264 10mbps (high resolution streaming version) H264 3mbps (low resolution streaming version) Note: uncertainty whether 1st year undergraduate film exercises should have a preservation copy due to limited usage	Undergraduate: total 6 works per student Postgraduate: total 3 works per student Approx. 150 films made per year at film school across the different cohorts and streams.
Other short promotional video related to the archive / collection (e.g. interviews with filmmakers)	JPEG2000 Pro Res 422 H264 10mbps H264 3mbps	Unknown but limited
Trailers	Pro Res 422 H264 10mbps H264 3mbps	Annual end of year screening trailers. Student trailers: unknown.
Publicity Stills associated with each film	JPEG Or TIFF	Allow up to 10
Behind the Scenes (instructional) stills associated with each film	JPEG Or TIFF	Allow up to 10
Press Kits	pdf	Usually created for second year undergraduate work or for graduate works only

Storyboards / visual realisation documents	Jpeg or pdf	Rarely created
Behind the scenes video (e.g. phone footage of how a stunt was conducted) – if available	H264	Unusual for students to do this. Could be mandated as educational requirement.
Clearance paperwork (cast and crew agreements, archival and music releases, location agreements, stills releases)	PDF and word documents	Each film might contain 50 plus release forms. ²⁴
Marketing / press clippings	pdf or jpeg	Unknown
Scripts (with student permission – the scripts were the copyright of the students)		Draft versions Shooting script Post-production script

Step 3: Once the items or artefacts to be stored in the digital archive were listed, the next step was to decide who the audience (users) were and their unique access requirements. For example, how would each of the users interact with the above items? Would they use them for teaching, learning or research purposes? What would an industry member (e.g., a festival programmer) wish to see as opposed to a researcher, or historian?

²⁴ Due to the mass amount of clearance documents involved in making a film, the project team decided early on that we were not going to include these in the digital archive system. The ongoing digital archiving requirements of this paperwork still needs to be considered by the Film School as it relates to the University's record management policy. The project team decided to include a section in the digital archive system, whereby the student or administrator could list the chain of title (clearance) information, for example, how many actors' clearance forms there were, music release terms etc.

This is outlined in the table below:

University	• Film & TV Staff and Students • Faculty staff and students • University staff and students from non-related disciplines • Sessional Academic Staff • Professional Staff ▪ Short non-award and other creative courses.
Alumni	• from the Film School • from the University
Education	• Secondary Schools • Other Universities: Australia and International
Industry	• Film Festival and programmers • Curators • Journalists • Historians • Researchers
External	• Public • Private researchers

These users were then micro categorised as each group had different status and access requirements – e.g., some of the users above would only research and view films, whilst others would need to create metadata and download films. This was further categorised as per the table below:²⁵

User group requirements:

Group	Subgroup	Access Permissions	Denied Permissions
Staff	Internal Staff	▪ Upload, download, add meta data, create playlists, collections	Cannot delete films

²⁵ These user group requirements were a wish-list only. Mediaflux, through Research Platform Services' did not enable us to employ such a granular permission structure. In the end, we decided on three users: Staff, Students and Guest access. Staff and students had the greatest functionality, whilst guests (which could include public, industry, researchers etc could only view and curate the collection, via password protected access request).

		▪ Add info e.g., marketing/ press info – scan article and upload to film/ file ▪ View analytics ▪ Bookmark video at certain points ▪ Insert marks onto image ▪ Create compilation of segments of multiple films, e.g., shooting from a vehicle, or stunts with animals	
	Assessor Staff	▪ Download films ▪ Rate films against criteria ▪ Suggest keywords ▪ Write comments ▪ Suggest audience ▪ Create playlists ▪ Reference video at certain points linked to written feedback	Cannot delete films Cannot edit metadata
Students	Students *will become alumni so login details will change. How?	▪ Student via log in (university address and personal email) ▪ Upload film ▪ Upload meta data ▪ Student can download H264 and pro res 422, after permission granted ▪ Automated option for a student to release their film before 2-year festival embargo	▪ Cannot replace/delete film ▪ Cannot edit other works
	Researchers	▪ Agree to terms and conditions of use ▪ Access citation references	Cannot download films Cannot edit metadata

		▪ Should be able to know what file versions are available to request ▪ Ability to add keywords or links to external research materials	
	Industry (Festivals and Distributors/ Exhibitors)	▪ Watch films ▪ Download copies of films as relevant file or supplied link ▪ Download or copy press kit, meta data (synopsis, filmmaker details) ▪ Should be able to know what file versions are available to request ▪ Push data to other organisations like Screen Australia or IMDB	
	Public	▪ View films ▪ Add comments (moderated) ▪ Identify locations (geo-mapping) ▪ Integrated links to actors' pages, filmmakers IMDb, blogs, websites etc ▪ Create playlists ▪ Like/ rate films	▪ Can view latest films after 24-month festival window over (perhaps they can see trailer or still image of film and associated meta data. Film can have release date listed)
	All	Note: All users should be able to hyperlink to whole or parts of films from another document such as if citing in an essay.	

The above table lists the functionalities the project team desired. Due to limited project resourcing, we were not able to implement all of these (see footnote #26 above). The actual user access and system functionality will be further explored in section 5.7 Post-Production.

It was noted that the Film School did not own the copyright in the other ancillary material (or associated artefacts as listed above), and this could potentially pose connectivity and resourcing issues for the project further down the track. The primary archive format held in the system would be a JPEG 2000 lossless (an open standard format designed to be accessible for generations to come). The lossless encoding simply means that there will be no loss in quality when converting to other formats when decoding the file. A ProRes 422 50Mb file was chosen as the exhibition screening version, an Apple format that uses lossy compression.²⁶ The ProRes format can be used as a high-resolution exhibition format screened in cinemas and can be transferred easily to other file formats. This means, that if a non-graduate film was to be mastered to a ProRes 422, it could then be transcoded to a Digital Cinema Package (DCP) file for festival screening versions and a JPEG 2000 for the archive.

Step 4: Map Out and Visualise Workflow and Requirements

It was intended that the digital asset management system be designed to hold many of the artefacts, such as those listed above. Due to the multitude of users listed above and the varying requirements and needs of each party, it was decided that the primary artefact was the “work” and other linked artefacts were to be connected to this. To classify films in the database under year group, or course stream, or student name, could prove problematic due to several variables, including nomenclature change. The film title may change leading up to its creation, but once locked off, it would be the item with the most consistency and once finalised, would not change.

Figure (8) below, and as produced by Arcitecta, illustrates the concept of the film as ‘work’ and the items/ artefacts attached to it.

²⁶ The term lossy compression was understood in conversation with the post-production coordinator, Gordon Lyon. Lyon describes this as a video file that minimises the data rate for transmission and distribution, with some subjective image quality loss. However, every codec that isn’t lossless or uncompressed will have some degradation of the image, although this may be minimal.

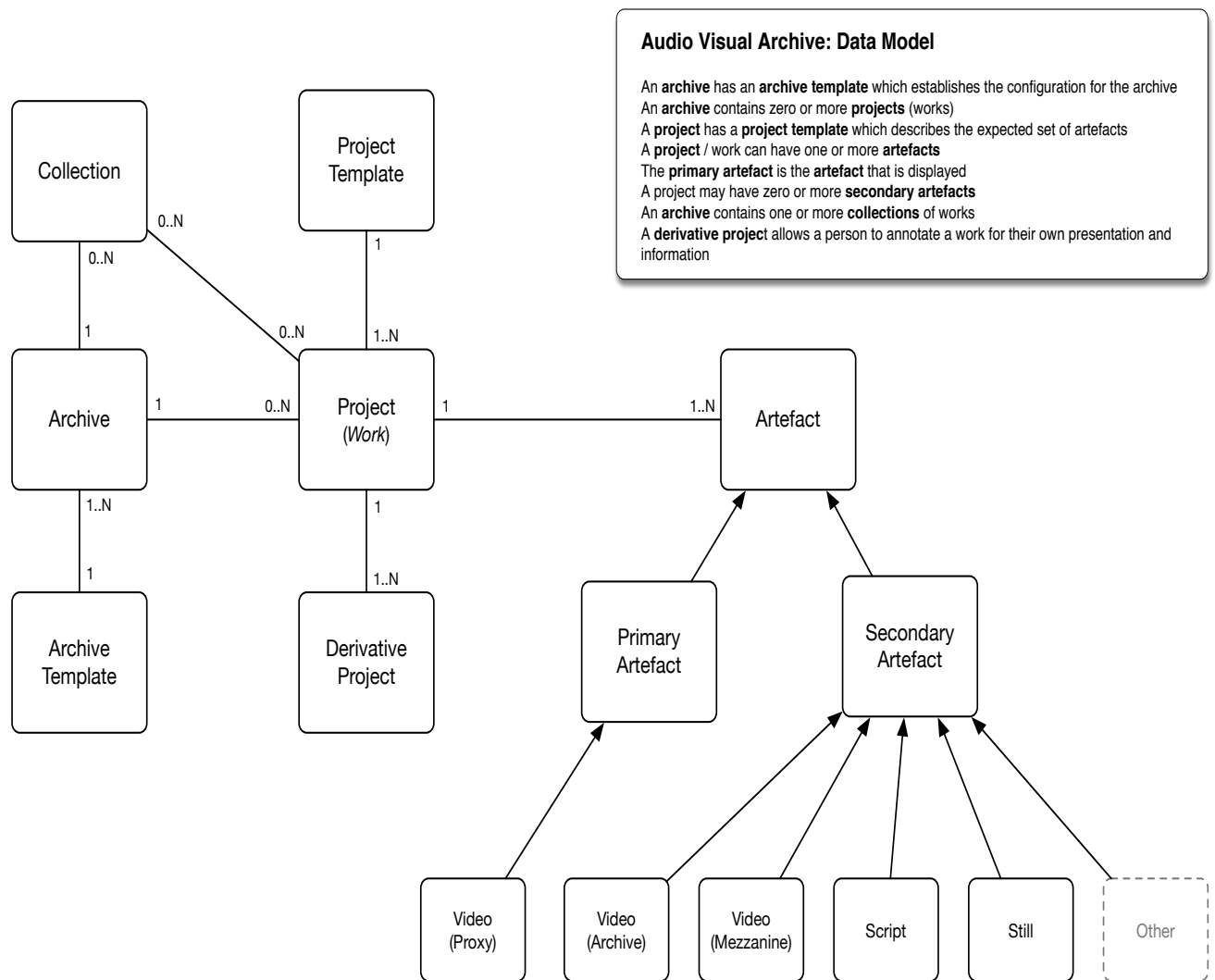


FIGURE 8 WORKFLOW DATA MODEL PRODUCED BY ARCITECTA TO SHOW THE EARLY STAGES OF CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT FOR THE INTERFACE.

The pre-production phase of the project allowed for some “blue sky thinking.” This included discussion around spatial/ temporal annotations, which would enhance the film’s pedagogical and research value. For example, it was proposed that parts of the film could be highlighted (or bookmarked) for users who had interest in showing a sample wide frame for teaching purposes or to note an example related to the camera as another aesthetic element. These were exciting suggestions that again pointed to the multidimensional aspects of the project. These imaginings took the project into different areas, all requiring significant time, resourcing, and effort, and which were eventually outside the scope of this project.

The below figure (9) shows the many exciting links, connections and opportunities between the digital archive system, organisations and people, which may later offer the collection greater contextual value and meaning. For example, when people listed in the credits of the films in the archive are added to the metadata, sophisticated algorithms could be further developed, to hyperlink those people and link them to their IMDb account, to other films in the archive or on the web, film festivals or screen agency listings. Alternatively, locations listed could be hyperlinked to councils or enlivened through geospatial mapping. These examples show the myriad of possibilities inherent in the data, however, require more research funding and investment to fully maximise the archive's potential.



FIGURE 9 AS ILLUSTRATED BY THIS DIAGRAM, CONNECTIVITY CAN BE LINKED TO ORGANISATIONS, SYSTEMS, INNOVATIONS, PEOPLE AND MORE.

5.3 LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE PREPRODUCTION STAGE

Creating the right data model establishes the context

This section offers a brief analysis of the lessons learnt during the phase of pre-production. The data model, as visualised above, created by Arcitecta and with the aid of Research Platform Services, allowed us to put objects into context and create and imagine data connection points to enhance meaning. The content was now ready to be enriched through engagement with its audiences. Once the material became available in an appropriate data model, it could then be harvested, analysed, and enhanced. The richer the metadata, the more valuable it can become and the more useful it can be for future generations. The type of forward thinking and connectivity as suggested and illustrated above means that data and social mining can have much value later. Although project resourcing dictated what we could achieve in this project, the 'blue sky thinking' and creative visualisations showed the affordances of the digital archive project to positively impact future teaching, learning research and engagement.

Setting clear expectations.

Like a filmmaking project, when designing a film, there must be a level of agility and flexibility inherent in the project's design and schedule. This facilitates a 'troubleshooting approach' when problems or challenges arise, which they inevitably do on any project. When all parties are upfront about what they can deliver and within a realistic timeframe, then a level of trust needs to be adopted to understand that each party will do what they say. I learnt that establishing check-in points, regular meetings, and milestones ensure accountability. On the flip side, I discovered that too much control or an inability to let go of control can leave other parties feeling disempowered and threatens collegiality between teams.

5.4 PRODUCTION (DIGITISATION): PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION

This section provides a workflow overview of the production period, focused on the digitisation of the films in the collection and the creation of the metadata schema. As with many of the technical aspects of the research project, the complexities and intricacies of this stage sit far outside the scope of this thesis. The aim of this section is to instead illustrate to the reader the multiple production pathways that we undertook working with a hybrid audiovisual collection. There were three different formats that the films were mastered on and that needed to be digitised:

1. A retrospective archive of 16mm celluloid films (approximately 500)
2. A retrospective archive of magnetic tape-based films; Digital Betacam, Betacam SP and a few Umatic tapes (approximately 1,200).
3. A born digital archive of current and future based works (approximately 150 short film titles produced annually).

Each of these mediums, required their own production (digitisation pathway). Perhaps this can be likened to producing a film shoot with multiple cameras or shooting formats (e.g., a HD film with 16mm film components or a digital film with VR elements). A specific technical plan needs to be adopted to deal with the uniqueness of the formats one is working with, along with engaging specialist personnel who have knowledge of these mediums. Below, are the three workflow charts used for the process of digitising each of the three audiovisual formats.

Workflow 1. Celluloid Film.²⁷

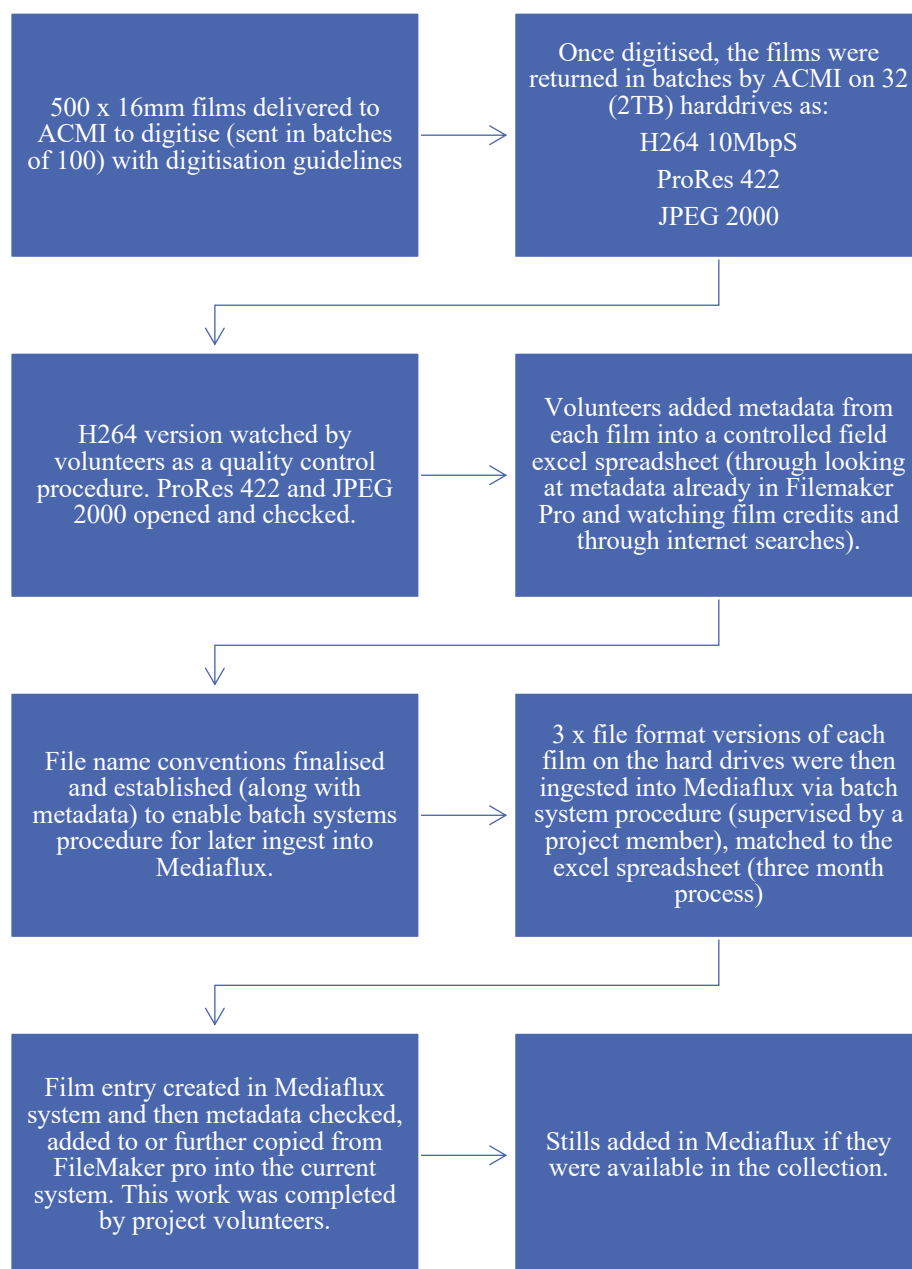


FIGURE 10 FLOWCHART TO ILLUSTRATE THE POST-PRODUCTION PROCESS FOR THE CELLULOID BASED FILMS.

²⁷ The celluloid films were outsourced to the Australian Centre for the Moving Image and digitised. This was achieved via a digitisation investment grant from Film Victoria and took a process of 12 months.

Workflow 2. Magnetic (Analogue) Tape Based Films

Approximately 1,200 retrospective graduate short films were stored on magnetic media: Digital Betacam, Betacam SP, HDCAM and Umatic Video). These were digitised in house by volunteers, using Film School equipment and through the purchase of a software system, *Metus*, which enabled converting the films to digital files per the process below. This process was made possible through the University Student Services Amenities Fund grant and is illustrated in the following flowchart:

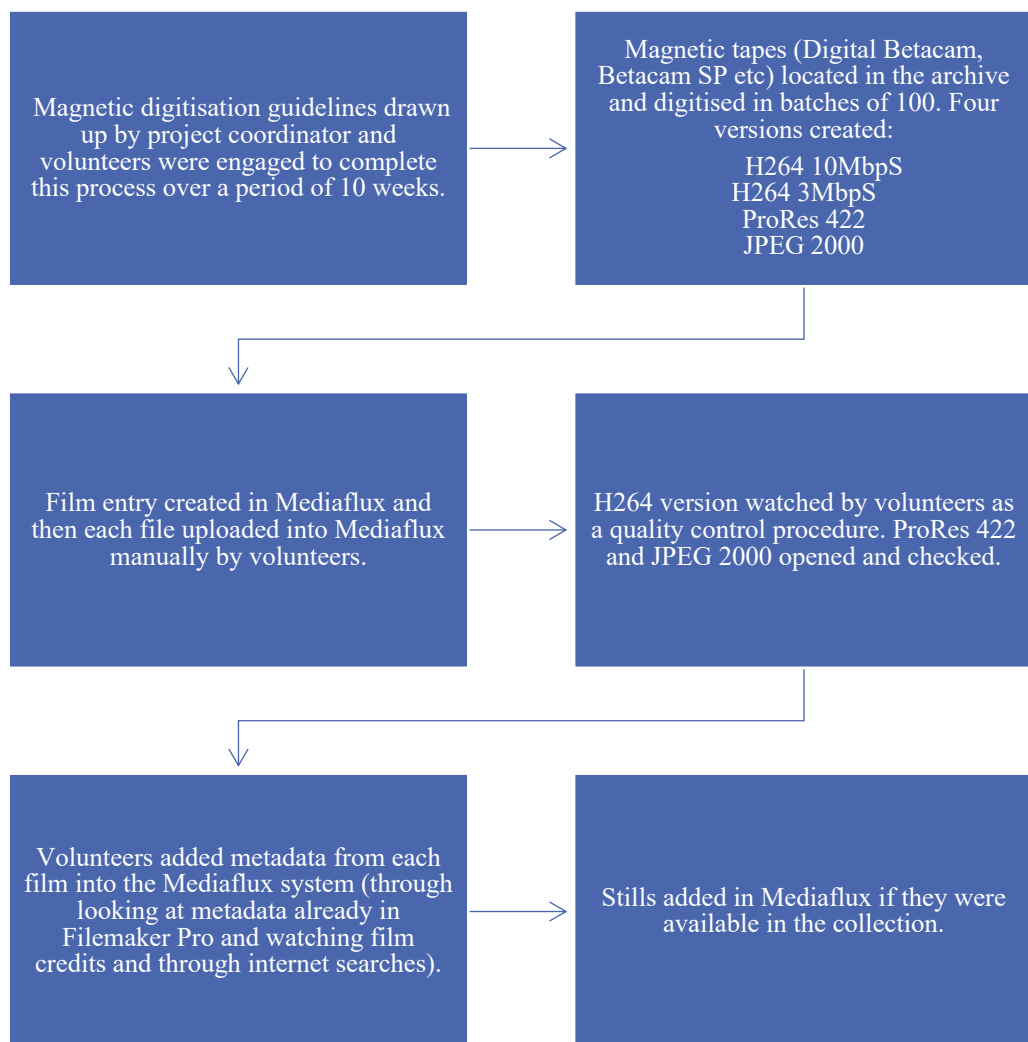


FIGURE 11 FLOWCHART TO ILLUSTRATE THE POST-PRODUCTION PROCESS FOR THE MAGNETIC BASED FILMS.

Workflow 3. Pathway for born digital films

The final workflow related to the born digital works created by current and future film students, which meant that approximately 150 additional films per year would be stored, preserved and accessible in the digital archive system. Once the retrospective archive of film works was digitised and in Mediaflux, the born digital pathway would become the new and standardised post-production process for the ingest of student films and the input of all standardised filmographic metadata.

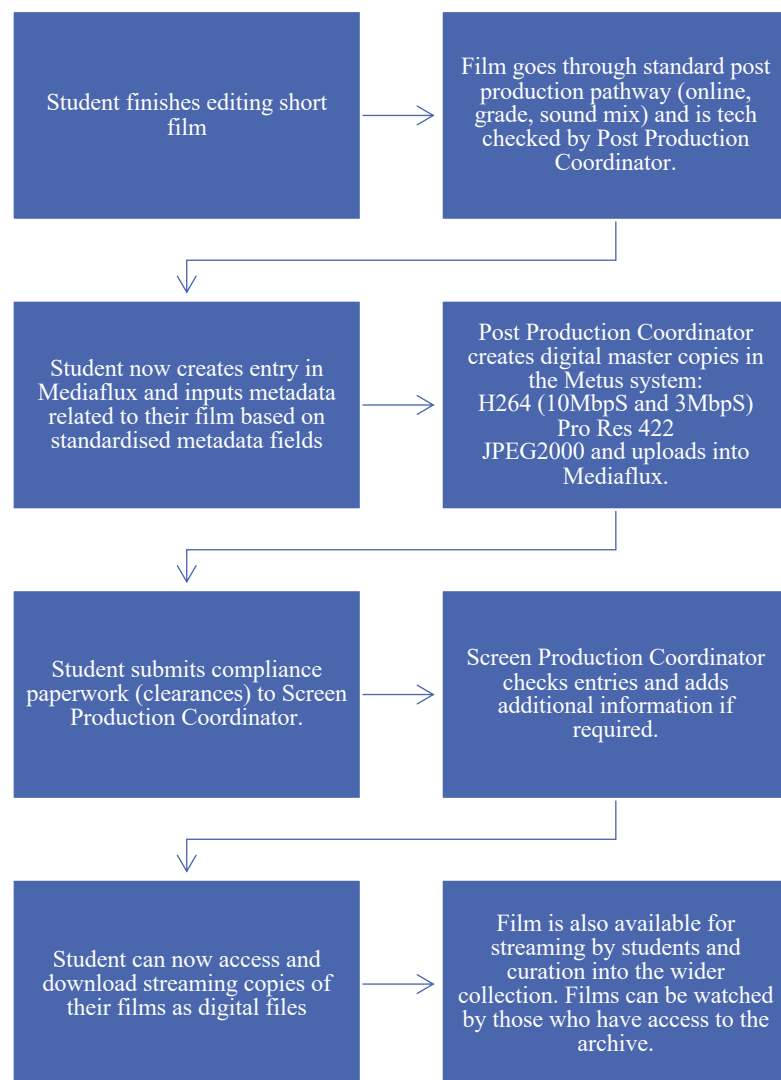


FIGURE 12 FLOWCHART TO ILLUSTRATE THE NEW POST-PRODUCTION PROCESS FOR THE BORN DIGITAL FILMS.

To some readers, the above flow chart might appear to have a similar number of steps as to the original post-production pathway (see flowchart in step 1, section 5.2) but this process shows that the student is more actively engaged in this process, from step three, whereby they enter the metadata related to their own films (previously performed manually by a staff member). Also, digital files are now created, rather than students receiving laserdisc master copies. Students can download a copy of their film in this process, search the database and curate their own collections. Before this system was established, students could not easily view other students' work, other than through DVDs held at the library and at the end of year Film School screenings.

5.5 PRODUCTION (DIGITISATION): STANDARDISING AND REFINING METADATA

I could write a whole thesis on metadata, although I suspect it may shorten my lifespan. This part of the project was the most time consuming, confusing, and convoluted. It required specialist know-how and drew heavily on the support of a volunteer archivist, Cassandra Gorton, who became a project coordinator to help deliver the grant obligations and the portal itself. Below is an overview of the standardised metadata that we chose to become part of the keyword search functions. Later, I will touch briefly on some of the challenges to do with the nomenclature.

What is included below should give the reader insight into the main areas chosen to standardise, that can serve a film school collection and its unique requirements. Whilst similar in many ways to the metadata required for any audiovisual collection, we added information such as production notes, awards, sponsors, festivals, budget and clearances. This data was chosen specifically to add value to the areas of teaching, learning, research and industry engagement, based on a distinct understanding of the screen industry within a film school setting. For example, listing the total budget figure is considered important as a benchmark for students to view other works made in similar contexts and with similar resourcing to reflect on the value for money on story and screen.

The metadata we decided upon was as follows:

Overview of Standardised Metadata:

Title, Other titles

Director, Director (other names)

Producer, Associate Producer, Director of Photography, Cinematographer, Camera Operator, Sound Recordist, Sound Designer, Editor, Composer, Music Performers, Screenwriter, Animator, Cast, Technical Assistance, Continuity, Grip, Production Manager, Assistant Director, Supervising Producers, Narrator, Translator, Research, Props, Hair and Makeup, Production Design, Costumes, Storyboard Artist, Additional Crew, Titles, Gaffer, Casting, Assistant Editor, Camera Assistant, Lighting Department, Set, Script Adviser, Art Director, Art Department, Unit Manager, Location Scouts, Visual Effects, Special Effects, Production Coordinator, Best Boy, Graphics, Focus Puller, Choreography, Rushes, Stills, Safety Supervisor, Stunts

Year, Era Depicted (e.g. Period, Middle Ages, Early)

Locations (Depicted)

Locations (Actual)

Description (Synopsis)

Themes/ Key words (controlled vocabulary), Genre, Setting (controlled vocabulary), (Geographic)

Item Type (e.g. moving image), Duration, Silent/Sound, Stereo/Mono, Acquisition format, Camera Model, Language, Subtitles, Colour/B&W, Aspect Ratio, Frame Rate, Sound Type, Vendor Quality Control Notes, Digitiser

H264 File Name, H264 File Size (GB), H264 File Location, ProRes File Name, ProRes File Size (GB), ProRes File Location, Original Formats, Archive Number

Production Notes, Awards, Sponsors, Festivals, Advisory Warnings, Budget

Actor Clearances, Archival Clearances, Stills, Music Clearances, Location Agreements

Warning dates for certain restrictions (e.g. festival embargo, music licence expiry)

imdb and alumni URL links.

The metadata interface looked something like this in the early stages (see figure 13 and 14):

VCA film meta-data

title:

other-title:

director:

name:

other-name:

contributor:

type:

name:

contributor:

type:

name:

contributor:

type:

name:

contributor:

type:

name:

contributor:

type:

name:

contributor:

type:

name:

contributor:

type:

name:

contributor:

type:

name:

contributor:

type:

name:

contributor:

type:

name:

contributor:

type:

name:

contributor:

type:

name:

year:

shooting-schedule:

start:

end:

era-depicted:

description-synopsis:

theme-keyword:

theme-keyword:

theme-keyword:

FIGURE 13 EARLY ITERATION OF METADATA IN MEDIAFLUX RELATED TO THE FIRST 50 FILMS DIGITISED, SHOWING INFORMATIC STRUCTURE OF STANDARDISED METADATA AS LISTED ABOVE.

genre:	1 Experimental
setting:	1 River
setting:	1 Beach
setting:	1 City
location-geographic:	1
item-type:	1 Moving Image
duration:	1 00:07:59
silent-sound:	1 Sound
language:	1 English
language:	1 French
language:	1 German
subtitle:	1 English
colour-bw:	1 Colour
aspect-ratio:	1 16:9
frame-rate:	1 24fps
sound-type:	1 Mono
production-note:	1
award:	1 Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films General Award (1988)
award:	1 Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Inc Award for Best Animation (1988)
sponsor:	1
festival:	1 Cannes Film Festival (1988)
festival:	1 Sydney Film Festival (1988)
advisory-warning:	1
budget:	1
actor-clearance:	1
archival-clearance:	1
music-clearance:	1
location-agreement:	1
stills:	1 Yes
original-format:	1 16mm
archive-number:	1 A0157
archive-number:	1 A0371
archive-number:	1 A0391
archive-number:	1 L0491 (Comp.)
archive-number:	1 L0491A
archive-number:	1 H0020
archive-number:	1 H0022
archive-number:	1 H0023
archive-number:	1 H0017
archive-number:	1 H0053 (Comp.)
archive-number:	1 H0068 (Comp.)
archive-number:	1 F0594 (Comp.)
archive-number:	1 F0617
digitisation:	1
quality-control-note:	1 Generally good condition
digitiser:	1 DAMsmart

FIGURE 14 CONTINUATON OF FIGURE 13.

5.6 LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE PRODUCTION STAGE

Metadata needs to be perfect in an imperfect world

At times, I observed tension between me and Research Platform Services (RPS) around the need to finalise the metadata and have it perfect. I struggled to see the perspective of RPS, as I felt that without the users fully engaging with the site, then the metadata should be dynamic and iterative and easily changeable. This was not possible however, as any change impacted the data structure and coding elements and required manual labour. The needs of each department and discipline spoke to the interpersonal and interdisciplinary dynamics common in collaboration. I had to accept that the metadata needed to be finalised well in advance and perfectly formatted (e.g., no spelling errors, defined fields, etc). The challenge with our student film collection was that nomenclature had changed over time, but the standards had to be decided upon without the interface being tested with students or users. This did not allow us to consider the nomenclature choice and limited us later when the system was implemented. In hindsight, I would have employed a user design process to test through these elements, however we did not have the resourcing in place to accommodate this. Overall, the metadata took endless hours of work and corrections, as there were often errors with spelling, formatting, and inconsistencies with terminology.

Practical considerations and challenges of network connectivity

During the pre-production and production phase, there were plenty of discussions around the internet protocol (IP) network. The connectivity to the main university campus, situated eight kilometres away in Parkville, Melbourne, was then only one gigabit per second, or 100 megabytes per second in total for all traffic. The network speed was insufficient for a project like this to transfer the digitised files into the Mediaflux system. These conversations were had in and around the project but proved to be much larger than the project itself. Greater conversations were going on within the University that I was not privy to but knew were necessary to ensure the project was supported within a larger infrastructure. I had been informed by technical staff that an increase in network requirements was planned, and so all I had to do was be on their radar in terms of them knowing the project existed. The impact on the VCA Digital Archive project was that it took hours to transfer the digital films (once digitised) into Mediaflux. Greater network speed would have helped speed up this process.

This exemplifies that a project like ours, sitting within a large institution, was only one cog in a larger wheel around university discussions of IP, network connectivity, and infrastructure and require a separate set of measurement and scoping requirements. The advantages of working within a university means that other departments may handle these matters, if they are adequately informed of the types of usage, services and needs of the faculty. The disadvantage is that operating outside of these institutional support systems can impact a digital archive project's long-term sustainability. The transfer of files did unfortunately slow this part of the project down and took many months to get the digitised films from the hard drives or Metus system into Mediaflux. Eventually, the network speed was increased, and the project was afforded by larger institutional support, operating outside, but alongside what we were undertaking.

5.7 POST-PRODUCTION: SITE DESIGN 1: THE ROUGH CUT

“Post-production is the process of assembling all the elements of a show (an edited picture, music and sound effects, visual effects and titles) to create a finished product. If, by virtue of the word “post,” you assume that it begins when principal photography ends, you’re wrong. It actually starts in early pre-production with the decision as to how the show will be shot and completed.” (Honohaner 2010, 463).

The above quote exemplifies the overlapping nature of a film production at each stage due to the many variables at play. In this section, I will be illustrating two significant parts of the post-production process as connected to the site design of the digital archive. Firstly, when a film is assembled, it is edited together into what is known as a ‘rough cut’. For the VCA Digital Archive project, this involved the first iteration of the site design, as illustrated by the two figures below.

Below, figure 15 shows an interface that looks much like a video library database. A simple and easily navigable menu is on the left-hand side and the films are listed from top to bottom in alphabetical order. Important metadata is listed next to a still image of the film and under the film title. This includes the director and producers name, film genre, duration, and short one line synopsis.

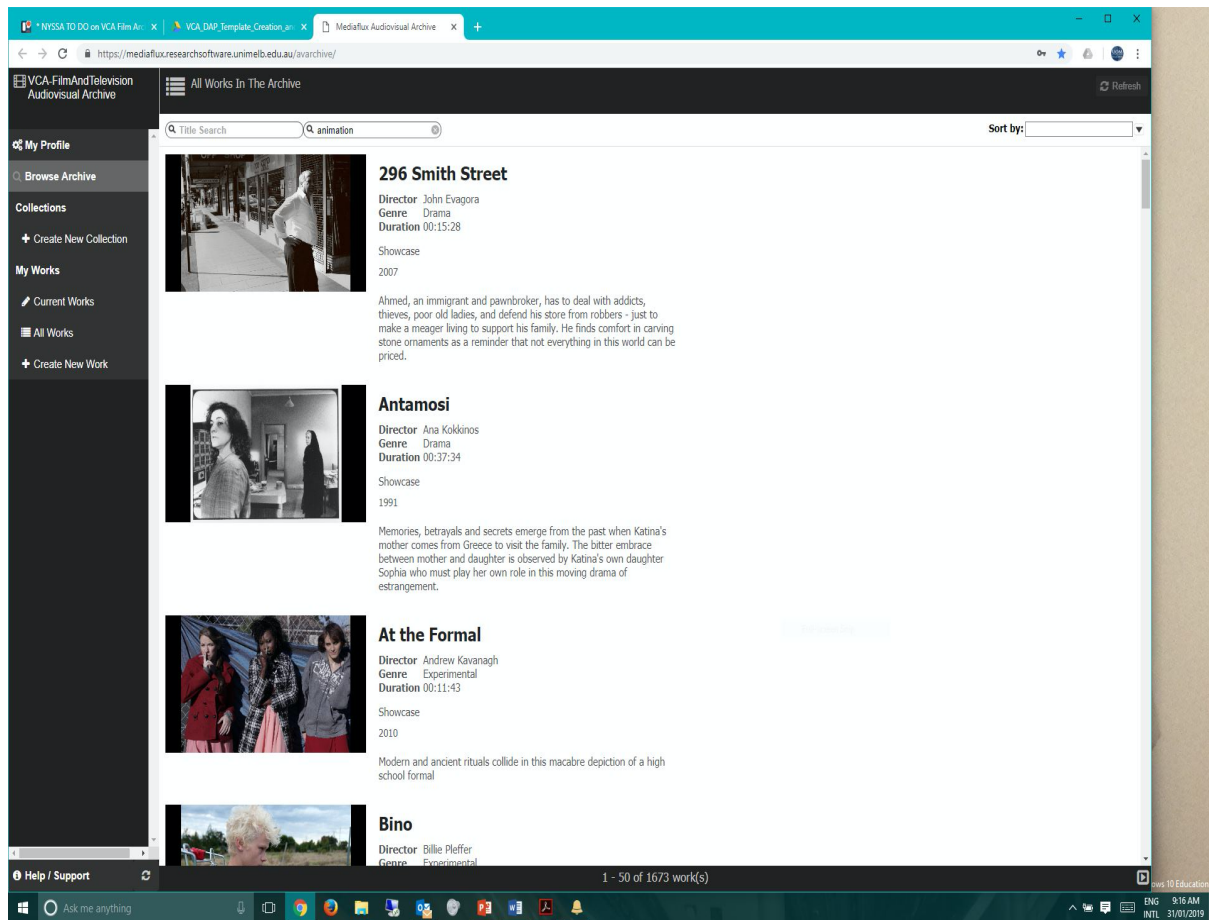


FIGURE 15 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 1 ‘ROUGH CUT’

In the below figure 16, once the user clicks on the title of the film, they move into a larger page, whereby the user can watch the short film and read more in-depth information per the metadata structure information decided upon in the pre-production stage.

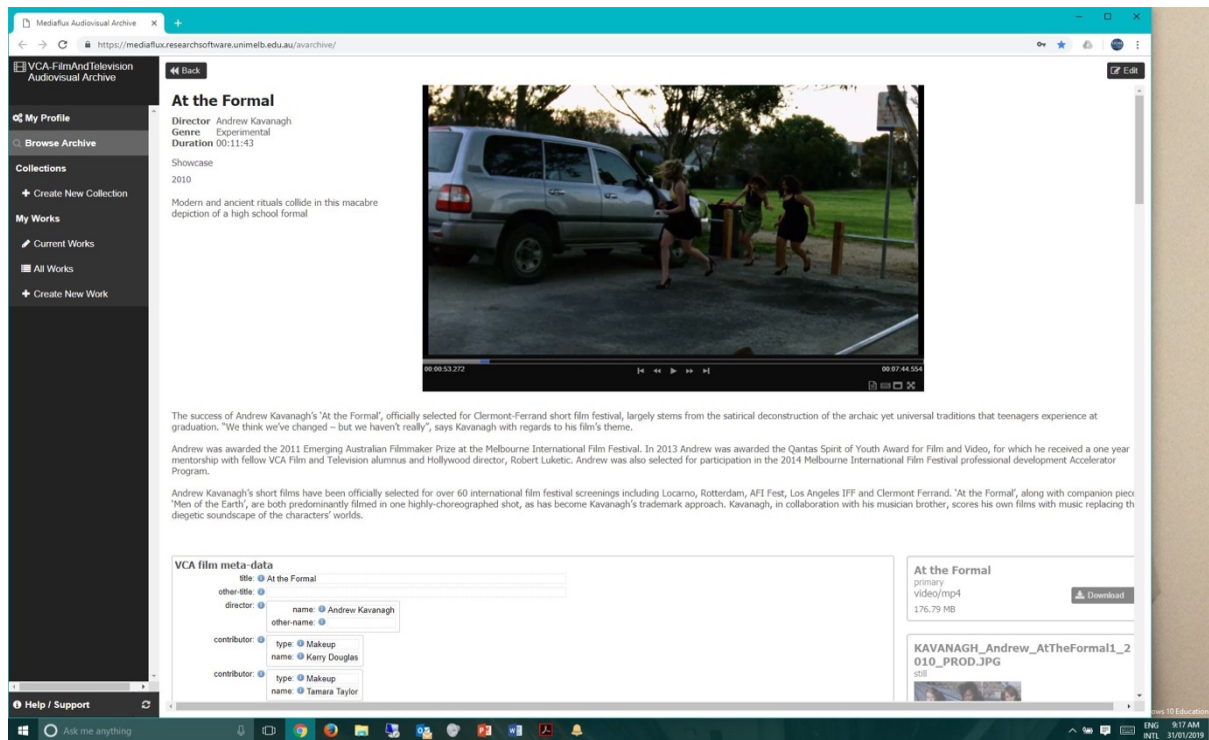


FIGURE 16 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 1. THIS PAGE ENABLES THE VIEWER TO WATCH THE FILM AND READ MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT IT.

The first iteration of this site was easy to navigate and structurally worked to house the films in the audiovisual archive. However, we wanted to arrive at a point where the user functionality was simpler and had a more contemporary look and feel. Once the design of this first site and data model was finished, the user interface could be further reimagined, and purpose built to better present the VCA Film School and the student films in a more sophisticated way. This took us into the next site design, which then became the release version of the VCA Digital Archive.

5.7.1 POST-PRODUCTION: SITE DESIGN 2: RELEASE VERSION

The release version of the archive went live at the end of this period (late 2019). The aim of this section is to show the evolution of the site and highlight the functionalities of the interface. The reader may choose to access the site here <https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/digital-archive> if they have access, or request access here <https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/digital-archive/request-access>.²⁸

The first screenshot (figure 17) shows the homepage, which enables the user to access the site. Here, users can choose their domain choice, which refers to their status as staff, student or guest. Each of these roles have different permission settings, such as:

- Staff (only Film and Television staff can access the digital archive under this domain): can view, delete films and create collections, edit metadata and add users to a film so they can also edit metadata.
- Students (only Film and Television production students are granted access under this domain): can view and create collections, edit metadata and add users to a film so they can also edit metadata.
- Guest (relevant to anyone who is not a Film and Television production student or staff member). These users can only view films and create collections.

The user can see the number of films in the archive (the test site reads 99 films and counting, but the live site contains over 2,042 films as of December 2020).

²⁸ The site is continuing to evolve as this thesis is written. The screenshots used here are the screenshots related to the final test site of the portal, released in February 2021. An earlier version of this site went live in late 2019, which is referred to in Chapter 6.

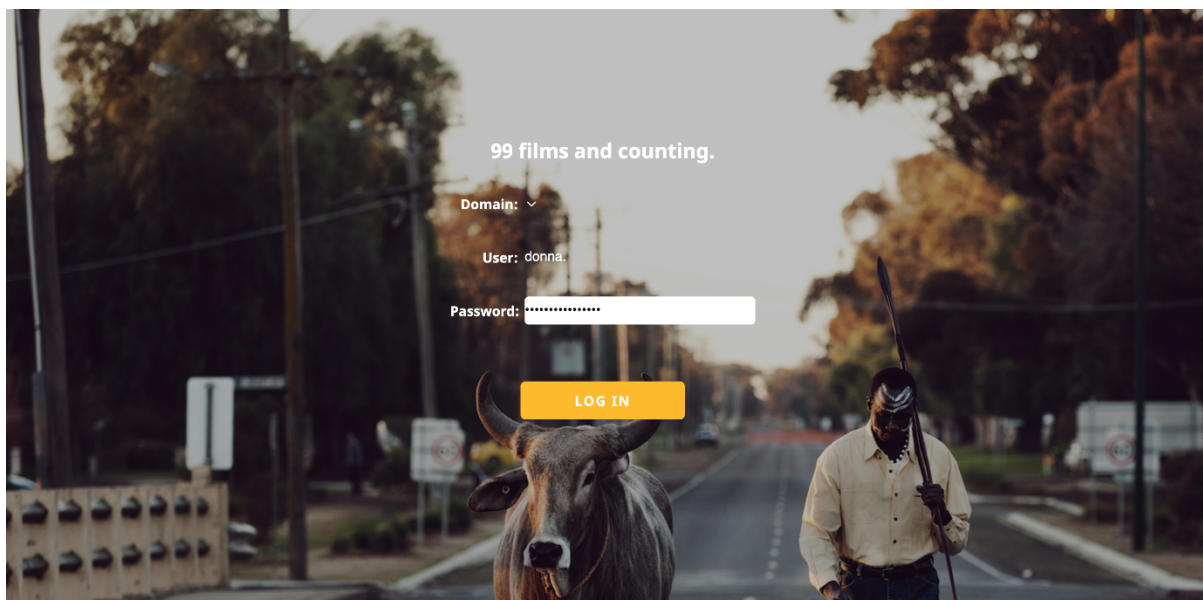


Figure 17 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE TEST SITE HOME PAGE

The next two screenshots (Figure 18 and 19) lead the viewer to the overall search page of the archive, where the user is taken after signing in. A featured film is set (which can be changed regularly by the administrator) and a user can search for a film title or other defined metadata in the 'Search the archive box' or scroll down and see the collection categorised into genre themes. On the right-hand side of the genre category, there is a 'Explore the Archive' drop down button to access further features and metadata options.

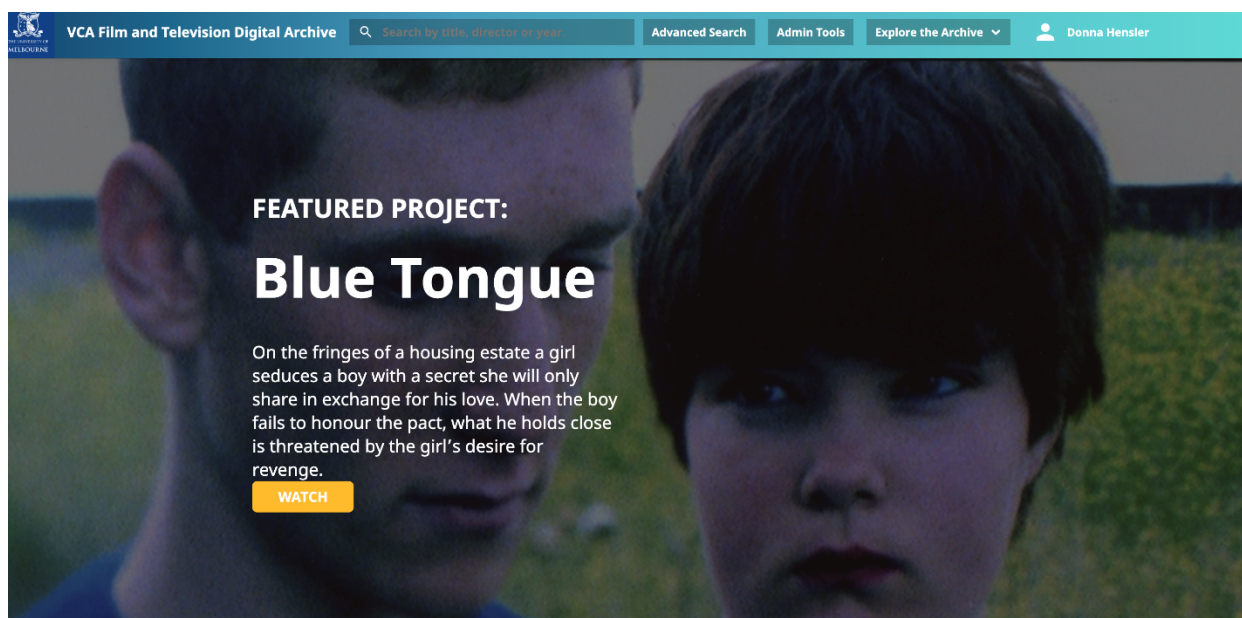


FIGURE 18 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE TEST SITE: ENTERING THE ARCHIVE

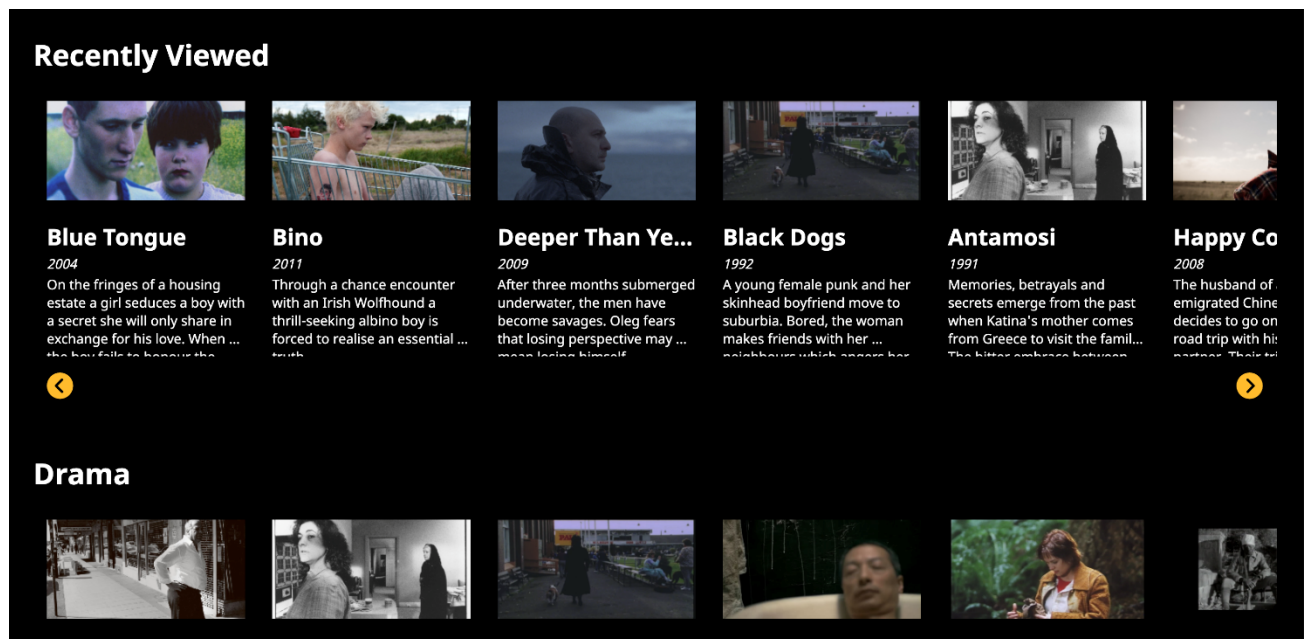


FIGURE 19 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: SEARCHING THE ARCHIVE (DRAMA CATEGORY)

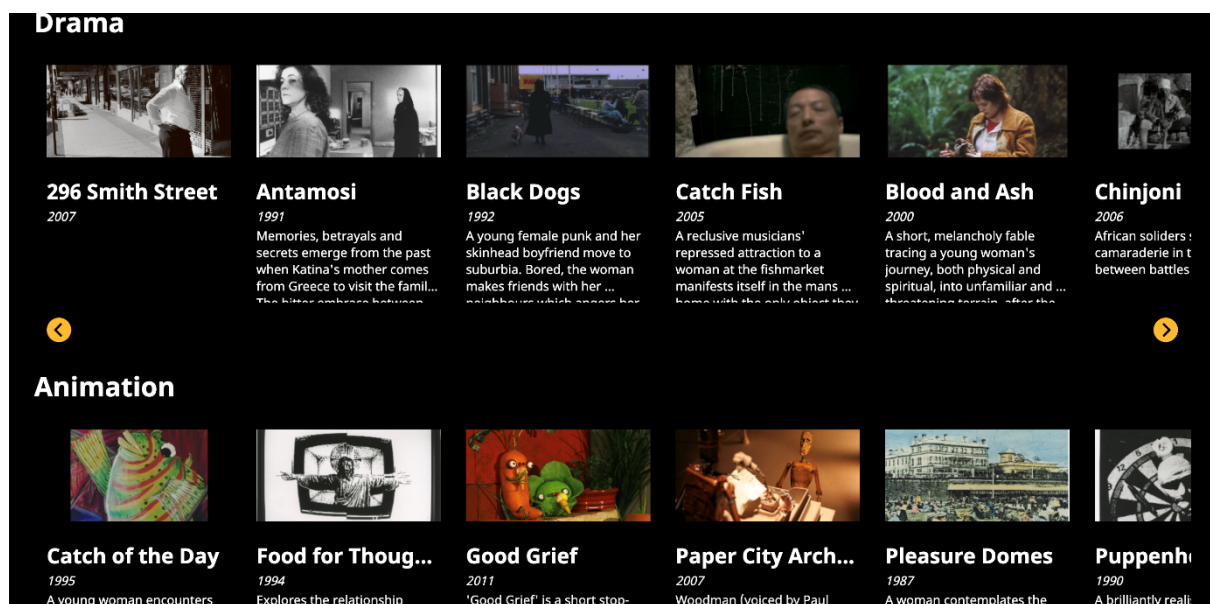


FIGURE 20 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: SEARCHING THE ARCHIVE (USERS SCROLL DOWN AND MORE GENRES REVEAL THEMSELVES)

As seen in Figure 20, when the user scrolls down, they can see the many films in each genre. The number of films in each genre is listed here:

<i>GENRE</i>	<i>NO. FILMS</i>	<i>GENRE</i>	<i>NO. FILMS</i>
DRAMA	790	CHILDREN'S	44
ANIMATION	379	HISTORICAL	19
DOCUMENTARY	278	WAR	11
COMEDY	398	WESTERN	4
EXPERIMENTAL	254	CRIME	23
HORROR	56	MYSTERY	23
THRILLER	62	ROMANCE	45
SCIENCE FICTION	78	FANTASY	48
MUSICAL	12	MUSIC VIDEO	11
ACTION	11	ADVENTURE	16
PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL	20		

In Figure 21, the screenshot displays how the user can click on the ‘Explore the Archive’ feature (on the right-hand side of the screen) to access the range of search options available to them, including exploring genres, collections and people.

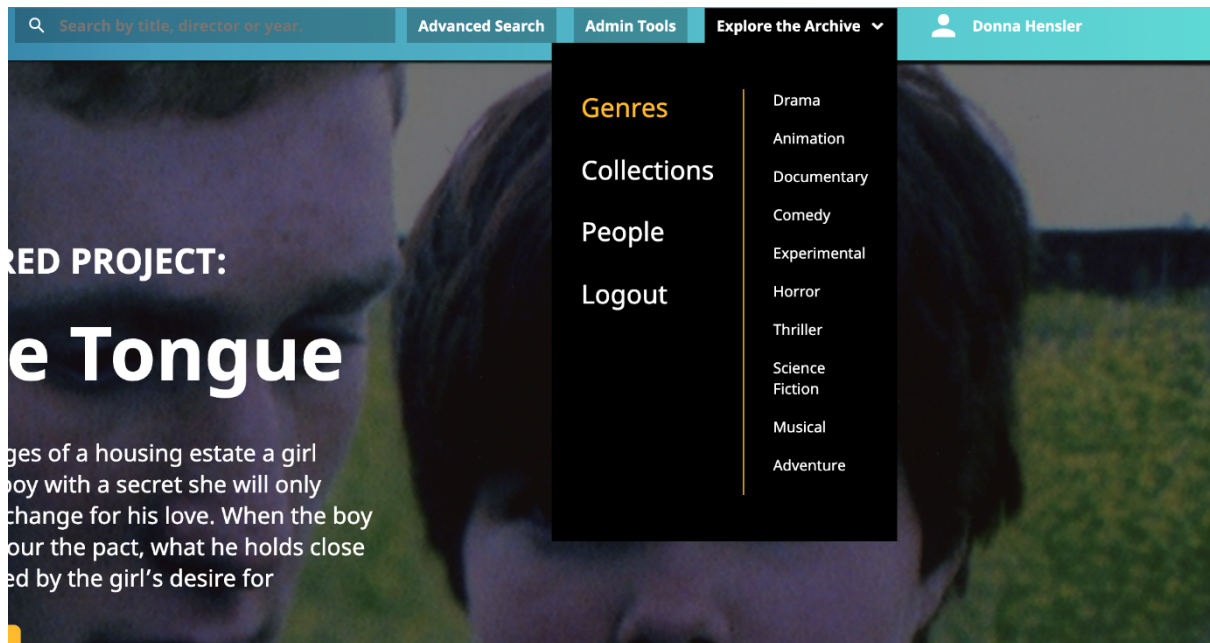


FIGURE 21 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: SEARCHING THE ARCHIVE

When the user selects ‘Collections’, they can then view curated collections (see Figure 22) and search the collection based on filmographic metadata, as seen in figure 23 - 25.

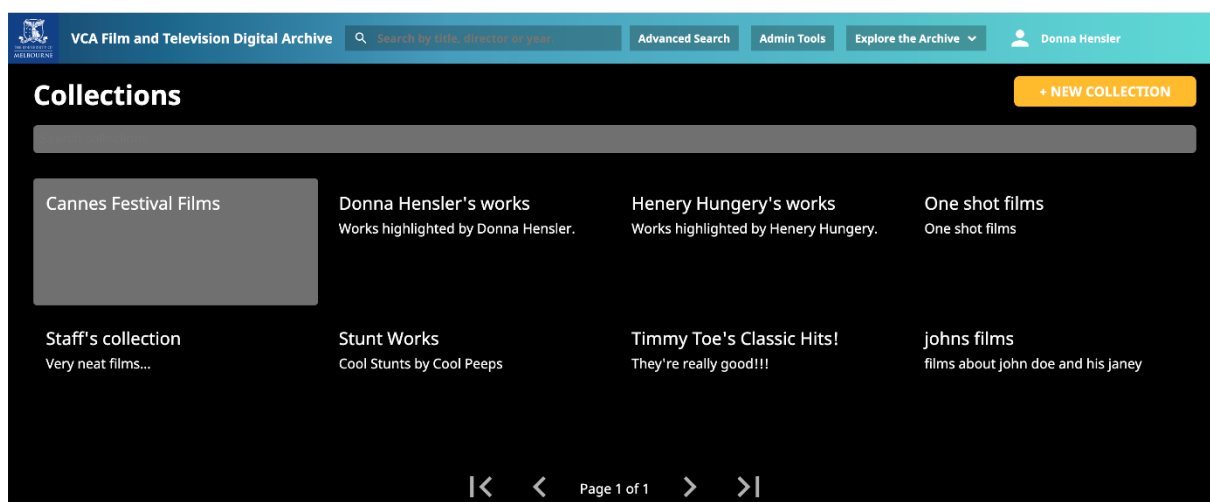


FIGURE 22 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: SEARCHING THEMED COLLECTIONS

The rationale for the design of the search function was to give users the ability to explore the digital archive based on the specialised filmographic metadata, such as cast, crew, locations, budget etc. Thus far, this function is still in development and requires a more sophisticated algorithm, pending future project resourcing. It does however offer insight into the connections that can be made between people, places and things, as seen in Figures 23 – 25.

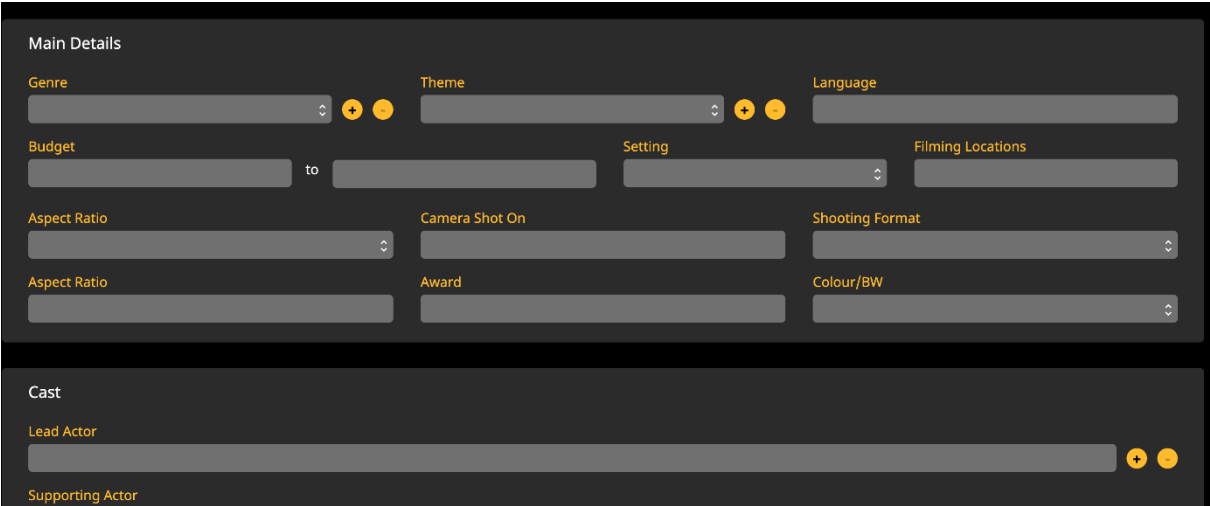


FIGURE 23 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: SEARCH FUNCTIONALITIES.



FIGURE 24 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: SEARCH FUNCTIONALITIES BY COURSE, GENRE, THEME, SHOOTING FORMAT AND MORE.

Supporting Actor

Voice Actor

Documentary Participant

Production Crew

Add Crew

Diversity Details

Gender Sexual Orientation Ethnic Group

First Nations People Home Country

SAVE THIS SEARCH CLEAR SEARCH

FIGURE 25 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: SCREENSHOT OF METADATA SEARCH TERMS.

Another feature in the design of the site includes the ability for the staff and student user to set up a profile (refer to Figure 26), which allow the person to create works and to be linked to film works in general (e.g., in a crew role, such as a producer or editor). This is another function of the archive that requires further development as there needs to be better search control functions. For example, there are often duplicate names in the archive with certain staff members. The post-production coordinator has duplicate entries, ranging from a surname that should be spelt as Lyon, but can be misspelt by students as Lyons. This shows the intricacies related to the metadata entry and the careful attention required to ensure metadata maintains a digital archive's rigour and standards. This is particularly pertinent in a Film School environment, as students require training and may not all operate at the same standards. This is an aspect of the digital archive that requires further thinking and development as to how to best future proof the information. After all, the metadata and search engine functions are what will make the digital archive meaningful for pedagogical and research purposes.

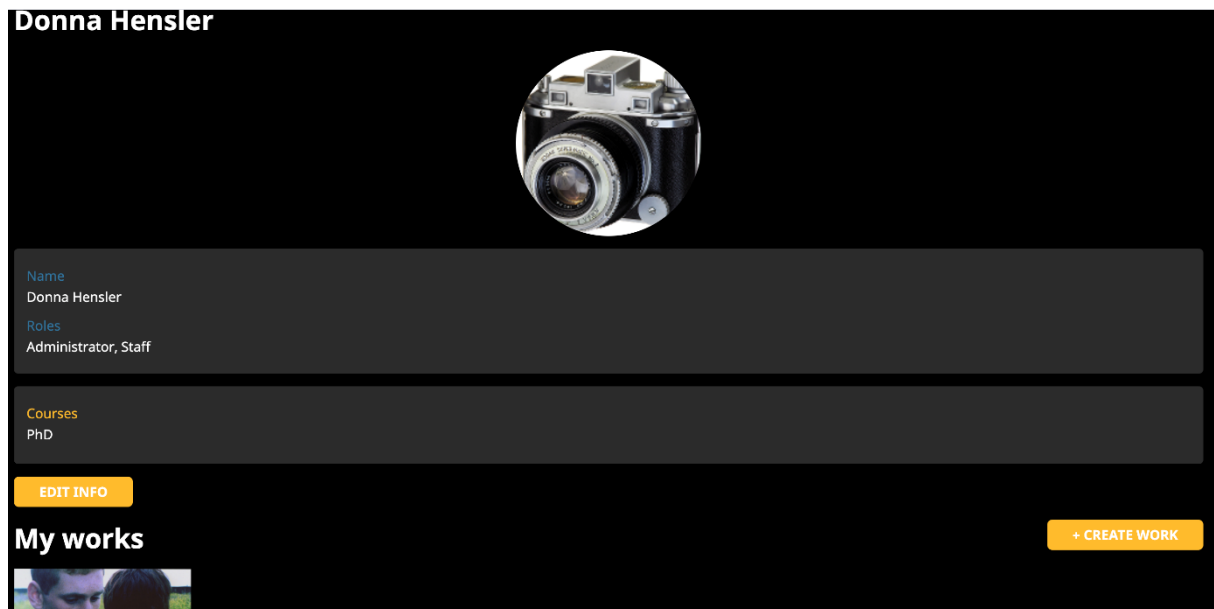


FIGURE 26 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: SETTING UP A PROFILE AND CREATING A WORK

Once the user sets up a profile, they can then create a new work. This is relevant to the current VCA Film and Television production students, who are making up to two films a year, depending on their stream (see figure 23). The process of adding metadata is then straightforward, enabling the student to type in standardised information related to their film, such as the year made, synopsis, course, description or context of making of work (e.g., if the film was a first-year visual exercise, with only 10 camera movements allowed or if the brief was to incorporate an action sequence, etc.). Students can also add cast and crew and click on the ‘+’ symbol to add more people (refer to Figures 29 - 30).

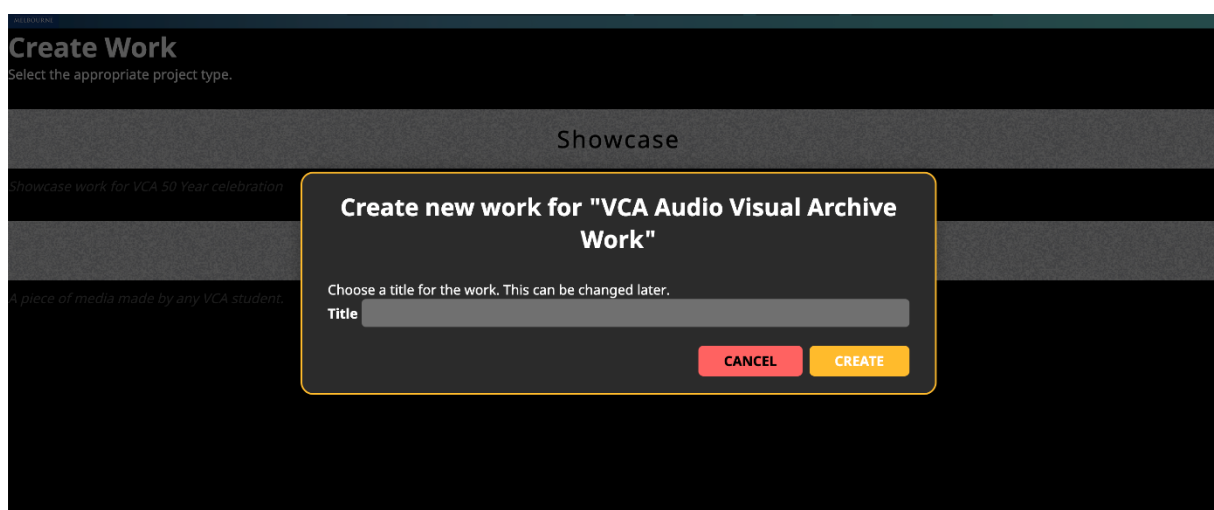


FIGURE 27 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: CREATING A NEW WORK.

Basic Information

Title
test

Year

Synopsis

Description

This field is HTML. Add more detailed information about your film, if relevant. You can also put links to the film's website, social media pages, crowd funding videos etc.

SAVE BASIC INFORMATION

FIGURE 28 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: ADDING INFORMATION TO NEW WORKS.

Main Details

Other title

Course

Stream

Semester

Context note
e.g. '10 shot film' or 'No dialogue'.

Duration
In the format HH:MM:SS.

Advisory warning

Genre

Director

Writer

Producer

Supervising producer

Executive producer

Associate producer

Director of

FIGURE 29 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: ADDING METADATA RELATED TO THE WORK.

Cast and Credits

Cast

Lead actor +

Supporting actor +

Voice actor +

Cast +

Documentary participant +

SAVE CAST

Production Crew

Production manager +

Casting +

Choreography +

1st Assistant Director +

2nd Assistant Director +

3rd Assistant Director +

Script supervisor +

FIGURE 30 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: CONTINUATION OF ADDING METADATA TO THE WORK

The metadata information includes information related to locations, themes and other technical information, such as camera and shooting format, as illustrated earlier in Figure 24. Students can also add diversity details to allow users to search films made by filmmakers based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and being First Nations. Clearance details can be listed to track licensing information regarding terms of music and archival footage usage. Finally, the student can upload stills, their script, treatment, press kit, directors' statement and production notes (refer to Figure 32 and 33). The post-production coordinator can then upload the file versions of the film in their various formats, enabling the student the ability to download a digital copy and view it in the archive to complete the film's contextual framing (see Figure 34).

Item type

Show apps

SAVE TECHNICAL DETAILS

Archive Details

Archive number

Digitiser

Digitisation notes

SAVE ARCHIVE DETAILS

Diversity Details

This information will enable researchers to analyse and explore gender, representation and cultural diversity at our Film School. For example, it would be interesting to know how many female directors graduated in 2016 (compared to 1980) or how many trans or Indigenous filmmakers have graduated from VCA film school. Research into these areas can enable us to address areas of underrepresentation so that our graduates can become part of a screen industry that is more inclusive and equitable.

Gender

Sexual orientation

Which of the following options best describes your sexual orientation?

Ethnic group

What is your ethnic group?

First Nations People

Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin?

Home country

Which country were you born in?

Notes

FIGURE 31 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: ADDING METADATA TO THE WORK (DIVERSITY AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION)

Location agreement

Approved

Details

Stills agreement

Approved

Details

SAVE CLEARANCE DETAILS

Marketing Material

Stills *Stills from the film. (2x crew stills, 4x marketing/publicity - as high resolution jpeg, min 300 DPI) Minimum 2 stills for non-graduate, Maximum 6 for graduate.*

Upload file (.png, .jpg, .jpeg)

Drag and drop or click to

Upload file (.png, .jpg, .jpeg)

Drag and drop or click to

Script or Treatment *Shooting script or treatment preferred.*

Upload file (.pdf)

Drag and drop or click to

FIGURE 32 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: ADDING METADATA AND MARKETING MATERIAL TO THE WORK.



FIGURE 33 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: ADDING DIGITAL VERSIONS OF THE FILM TO THE ARCHIVE.

If the student enters all the metadata in a considered fashion, the above process will result in a rich, comprehensive, and contextual summary of the student film work (as evidenced by the screenshot in Figures 34 – 38).

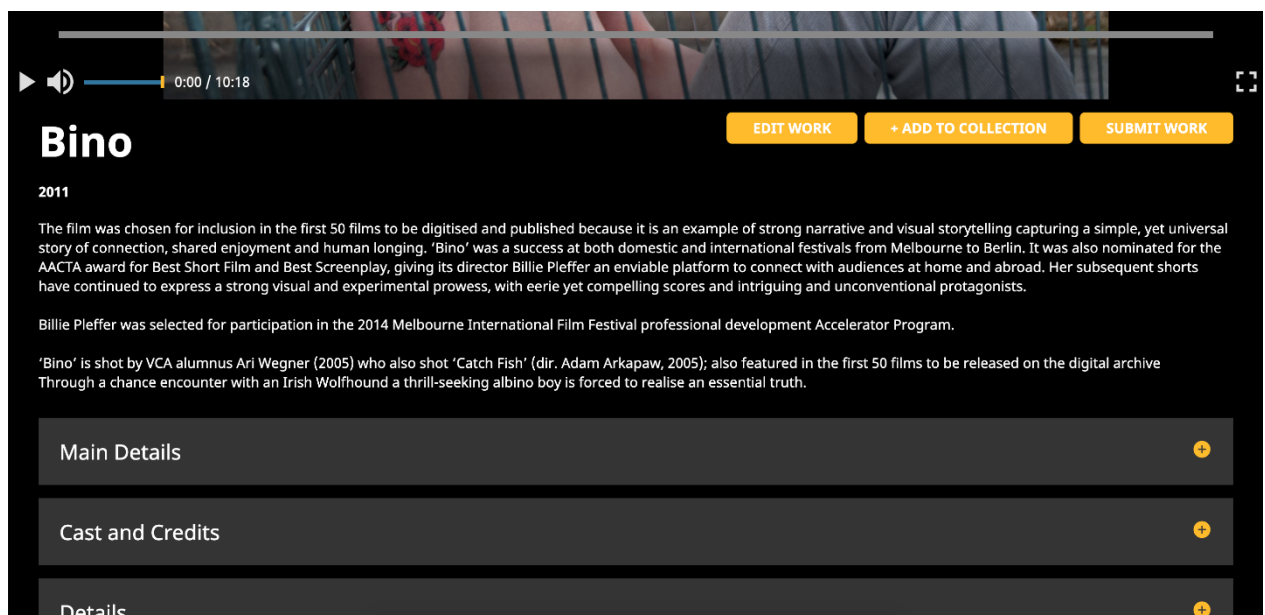


FIGURE 34 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: PRESENTATION OF STUDENT FILM WORK.

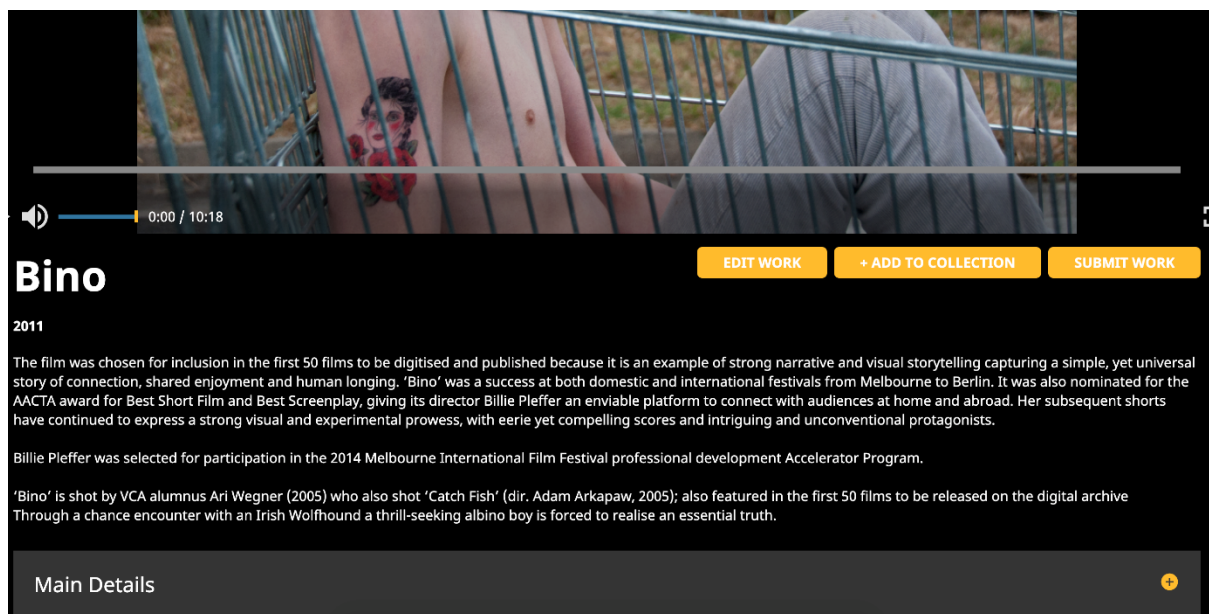


FIGURE 35 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: PRESENTATION OF DETAILED METADATA RELATED TO A STUDENT FILM.

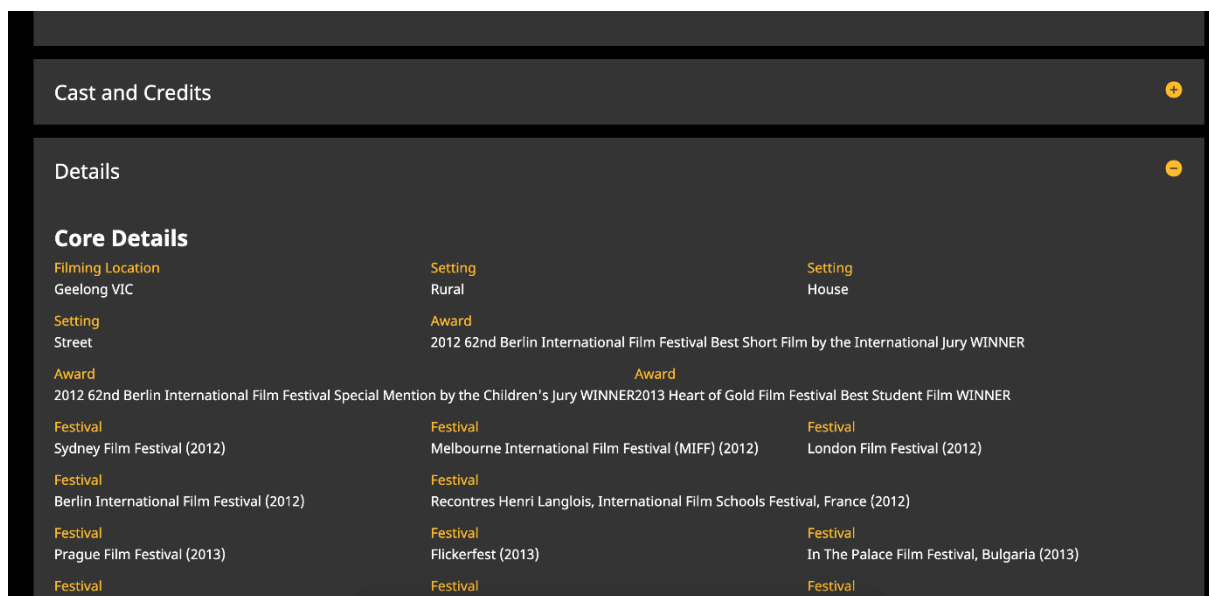


FIGURE 36 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: CONTINUATION OF THE PRESENTATION OF DETAILED METADATA RELATED TO A STUDENT FILM.

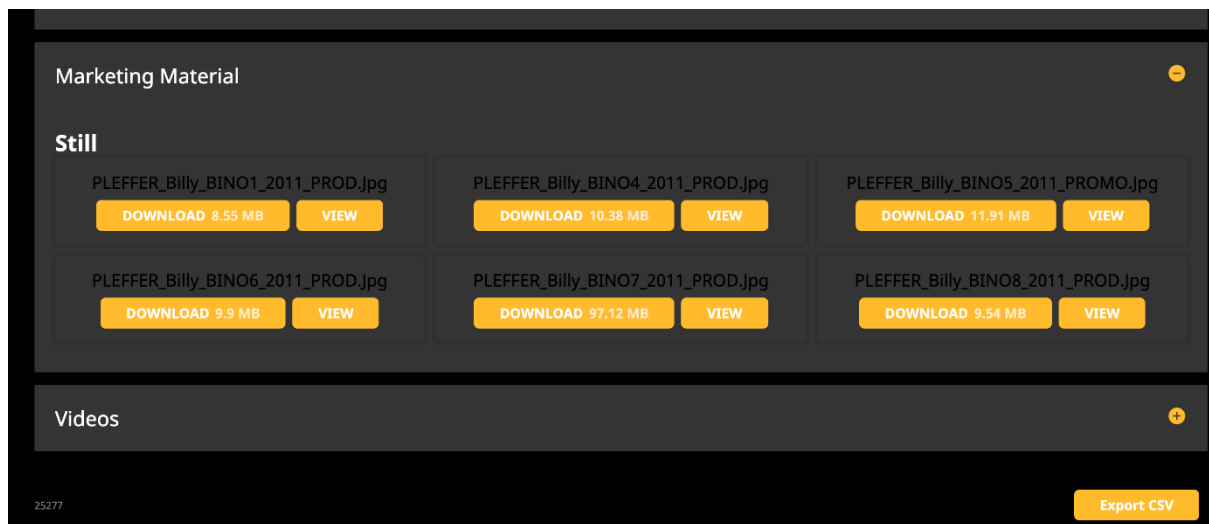


FIGURE 37 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: USERS CAN CLICK ON STILLS TO VIEW THEM.

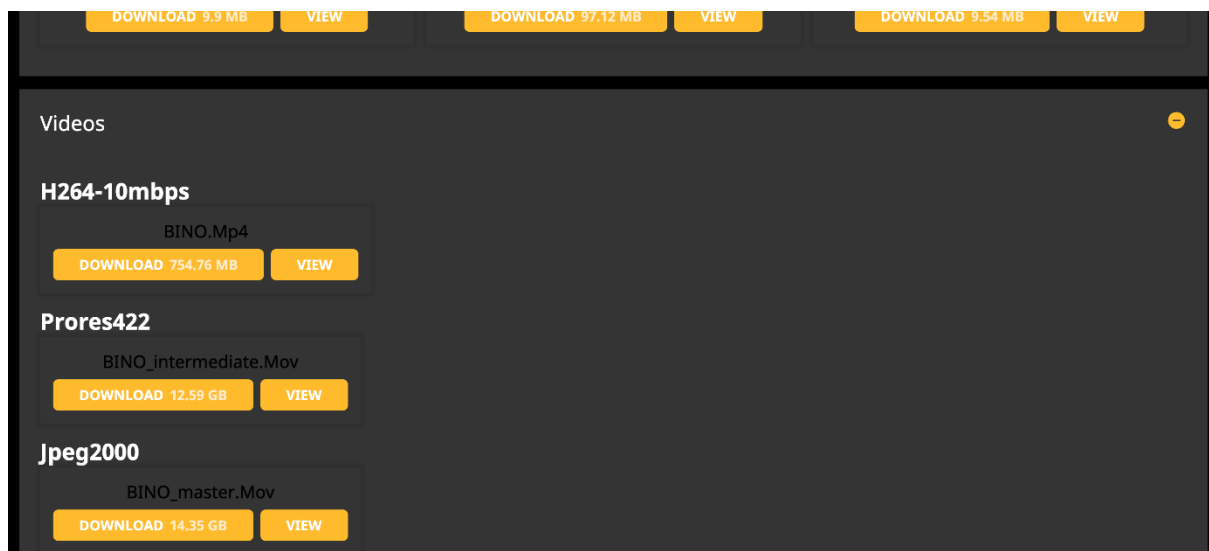


FIGURE 38 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE SITE DESIGN 2: USERS CAN SEE VIDEOS AVAILABLE.

5.8 LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE POST-PRODUCTION STAGE

Communication must be Clear and Consistent

Communication between all parties is vital to ensure the successful realisation of a project. Regular emails, team meetings, and online meetings were called to ensure parties aligned their thinking and action. One of the major challenges related to communication difficulties between disciplines. The miscommunication was often based on different understandings of nomenclature or differences in personality types. One example of this included miscommunication around the term ‘archive’, ‘digital asset management system’ and ‘repository’. I viewed Mediaflux simultaneously as archive, digital asset management system and digital repository, whereas Research Platform Services viewed it as a database solution for research data. Although I had been very open about my understanding of the system, this misunderstanding only revealed itself towards the end of this phase. I later reflected that I should have drawn up a glossary of terms to ensure that we had a shared language to start with. This showed me that I had veered away from my desire to draw on critical and participatory action research methods (as discussed in Chapter Three). I had not created a “communicative space for communicative action” (McKemmis et al. 2014, 93), whereby the members involved in the project had reached a mutual and shared understanding of each other’s points of view. Building strong communication systems was a continual process throughout the project and became the most difficult part of managing as it required so much time and attention. This was challenging to manage due to competing tasks and insufficient project resourcing.

Users Must Drive Design

The decision to invest time and money into a redesign of Mediaflux was made with the understanding that Arcitecta specialised in computer science, software engineering, and development, not interface design. In hindsight, this proved to be a significant challenge to this final phase. While Arcitecta agreed to take on the designer's role, I was asked to provide examples of best practice sites to model the site design. This worked out as a cost-effective option for the project, but on reflection, not engaging with a proper designer resulted in me becoming a pseudo designer, directing the look and feel of the site, which was not something I felt comfortable in doing. I did not have the expertise to do this and later realised, that a site

should be developed with a human centred design approach so that the users are the ones who dictate its functionality based on their needs and search for information flow.²⁹

These aspects of the project were challenging to manage effectively with competing workloads, including settling into a new academic position and taking on a leadership position within the faculty in teaching and learning. This exemplifies the limitations of the producer role. There is a need for the producer to drive a project and assemble a creative team, but as much as the practice of the producer is to spearhead a project, a key function of the role is to engage people to realise the specialist skills needed in each area, from director through to editor, key art designer and more. According to Lee and Gillen (2011, 191) “Producers are best served by team members who are not just good at what they do but also have the attributes, character, and operating styles complementary to the producer and the rest of the team (Lee and Gillen 2011).”

The lack of resourcing in the digital archive project forced me in many ways to jump into a myriad of roles that should have been outsourced or achieved with the aid of a larger team. In retrospect, it would have been better for me to allocate part of the budget to employ a designer and digital producer to work with Arcitecta and drive this part of the process.

To achieve the final design, I drew on an example of the film festival entry database site, *Withoutabox*, based on the designed stimulus. This site (which no longer exists) assisted filmmakers looking to submit their films to film festivals around the world. Filmmakers were able to upload a digital copy of their films and ancillary information (e.g., press kits, still images, production notes, biographies) and include project, technical, and marketing metadata to aid in the selection of the film at chosen festivals. This type of interface structure was easily navigable and essentially achieved many of the things that we desired. We drew on an

²⁹ Human-centered design is a holistic approach that uses design thinking to place the user at the centre of website development and testing. Airbnb and Pinterest are design-driven companies that use human-centered design to drive user and audience. The process is about finding out what users/ audiences need, how they want to interact and engage with the content, and then designing the system, using the user to drive the process, provide feedback at each stage, and through iterative prototyping. Readers may wish to find out more at Thomsen, Dave. "Why Human-Centered Design Matters." Wired. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://www.wired.com/insights/2013/12/human-centered-design-matters/>.

employee's expertise at Arcitecta, who also happened to be a current film and television student at the Film School. This afforded us an 'insiders' perspective on how a student could and would interact with the portal. The student, Nyssa Mitchell, had demonstrated a talent for design, and so this helped address some of the challenges of not having a design company on board to drive the process within a user design framework.

In hindsight, although I would have approached this part of the project differently, it demonstrates the enrichment value of the VCA Digital Archive Project. Working with a VCA film school student based at Arcitecta, exemplified the value of incorporating student experience beyond the classroom for both student and organisation. The digital archive project was a community building exercise, strengthening not only my skills as a practitioner, but the expertise of all involved along the way.

5.9 MARKETING | DISTRIBUTION: CURATING THE ARCHIVE

The final two sections of this chapter focus on the site's deployment and release. An initial vision of the project was to create a publicly accessible digital archive (meaning no password access required). As the project progressed, a few things became clear:

- Hosting the digital archive within the University meant this was impossible due to the network system hosting other data within its configuration. Users would need to log in to the system via their University sign-on credentials or request access;
- If we invested in the development and design of a site by a third-party developer (which we were exploring), the likelihood of its survival was slim. We did not have the budget or resourcing in place to support technical upgrades, maintenance, and other costs to present the collection effectively;
- The 50 films released on YouTube during the 50th anniversary revealed that students and alumni were supportive of the project but wanted to have control over the public facing aspect of the digital archive. Essentially this would mean two sites: a site focused on institutional pedagogy and research purposes and another for public curation. We did not have the resourcing for this in terms of budget, time, and personnel.

To resolve the above dilemma, I decided in late 2018 to capitalise on the third party, user-friendly video platform YouTube and use this as our engagement site for public access. During my research trip in the development phase, I learned that most institutions I visited drew on YouTube as a valuable resource to highlight their collections and draw interested viewers back to their institutional site via descriptive metadata and hyperlinks.³⁰ This meant curating the collection and releasing selected films on YouTube, serving to fulfil the Student Services Amenities Fund (SSAF) grant collection requirements and the engagement part of the project vision (based on making films publicly accessible). Importantly, it affirmed digital preservation research (Mahon and Siegal 2002, 116) stating that technological choices about data formats, structure, and access must support a wider goal of creating a perpetual archive.

Curating the films for YouTube became a whole project in and of itself and I have deliberately chosen to superficially address this because it speaks to the producer's multifaceted and complex role. The professional screen producer is intensely involved in engaging with distinctive fields and domains, each of which displays a high level of nuance, intricacy, and knowledge specialisation. Yet, I could not have achieved each level of this project without my skill base as a producer and understanding of the filmmaking process.

The ability to activate and engage the archive is central to ensuring it reaches the diversity of audiences intended. This aspect of the project saw over 125 films from the VCA Film School Archive released onto YouTube. These films were further curated into themed collections, based on genres, subject matters, and the interests of writers from disparate fields, including the arts, sciences, information management fields, and creative industries. Writers were commissioned from these industries (such as a documentary film curator, a University librarian and a writer with lived experience of mental illness), to choose films from the collection and write about or in response to them. For some, these inspirations were creative or thematic, including discussions of dance films through to identifying the top ten horror films in the collection, through to filmmaker profiles and an analysis of the representation of the city of Melbourne in short films. One writer, Alice O'Rourke wrote a poem out of film

³⁰ An example is britishpathe.tv, who state on their YouTube channel that they are an "award-winning online video streaming service featuring hundreds of full-length documentaries. It is designed for specialist audiences such as history buffs, royal watchers, cinema aficionados, and train enthusiasts" (Youtube.com. 2009. *British Pathe*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYbbONIfX_0> [Accessed 10 October 2015]).

title letters, to represent a constellation of words (see Figure 39). Alice describes the formation of the poems, stating; “The title of the film runs downwards in the middle of the image and the accompanying letters surrounding the central core letters create tangible and cohesive words to convey the theme and subject of the film.”³¹ Alice worked on the digital archive project for a period of a few weeks during her tenure at the University as the recipient of the University of Melbourne’s International Museum and Collections Award.

a B sent
state of m I nd
or mome N t of
c O ntent bliss?

open w A ter
f L ickers
L ike the
fl A sh
in T he
wi S e
E yes
of p A t

FIGURE 39 WORD ART PRODUCED BY ALICE O’ROURKE, BASED ON TWO FILMS IN THE VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE ‘BINO’ AND ‘ALL AT SEA’.

The commissioning of writers to engage with the films in the archive, helped to build the archive’s permanence. It moved the digital archive from a production space to a marketing and performance space, whereby the works were enacted and re-created by others, evolving into a continuum of knowledge. The archiving of these text based works added to the archive as body; building a body of knowledge. Past and contemporary works could now be (re)captured, (re)used, and (re)purposed. This process affirmed the 'living archive' notion – blurring the

³¹ The two films Alice watched and responded to were ‘Bino’ (2011), a short film written and directed by Billie Pleffer and ‘All at Sea’ (2011), a short documentary written and directed by Leah Sanderson. See: ‘Rourke, Alice. “VCA Digital Archive: Word Art.” Faculty of Fine Arts and Music News, July 25, 2019. <https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/about-us/news/vca-digital-archive-word-art>.

boundary between memory and perception. Perhaps it was humanising the technological and memory practice through a deeper interaction with the films as temporal objects (Torlasco 2013, 3).

Once the project's public engagement aspect had been activated and marketing material created (25 press/ marketing articles were commissioned and 125 films released on YouTube with accompanying simplified metadata), then I prepared a release strategy for the articles to go live fortnightly on the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music's 'news' website, with links to the films referenced on YouTube. This built momentum for the overall digital archive project between staff and students at our Faculty and the wider University, along with increasing our public profile. The articles (see Figure 40) referred to the digital archive portal becoming available for research access from mid-2019. To prepare for this, a gateway to the digital archive portal needed to be created.



21 Aug 2019 | FILM AND TELEVISION

VCA Digital Archive: dance on film

The VCA Digital Archive is a living audiovisual record of student films that date back to 1966. The articles in this series respond thematically to the depth and breadth of the collection. Enjoy!By Alice O'Rourke



25 Jul 2019 | FILM AND TELEVISION

VCA Digital Archive: Word Art

The VCA Digital Archive is a living audiovisual record of student films that date back to 1966. The articles in this series respond thematically to the depth and breadth of the collection. Enjoy!By Alice O'Rourke



18 Jul 2019 | FILM AND TELEVISION

VCA Digital Archive: The City

The VCA Digital Archive is a living audiovisual record of student films that date back to 1966. The articles in this series respond thematically to the depth and breadth of the collection. Enjoy!By Yvette Putra



16 Jul 2019 | FILM AND TELEVISION

VCA Digital Archive: an interview with filmmaker Qiu Yang

He recently won the Leitz Cine Discovery Prize during Critic's Week at Cannes. Meet the Changzhou-based filmmaker and VCA Master of Film and Television graduate Qiu Yang.By Duncan Caillard



27 Jun 2019 | FILM AND TELEVISION

VCA Digital Archive: why so queer?

The VCA Digital Archive is a living audiovisual record of student films that date back to 1966. The articles in this series respond thematically to the depth and breadth of the collection. Enjoy!By Xu Xiong



20 Jun 2019 | FILM AND TELEVISION

VCA Digital Archive: menstruation as inspiration

The VCA Digital Archive is a living audiovisual record of student films that date back to 1966. The articles in this series respond thematically to the depth and breadth of the collection. Enjoy!By India Murphy



FIGURE 40 A SNAPSHOT OF SOME OF THE ARTICLES THAT WERE WRITTEN TO CURATE AND CONTEXTUALISE THE COLLECTION, WHICH SHOWS THE DIVERSITY AND BREADTH OF THE COLLECTION AND THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE'S POTENTIAL TO ACT AS CREATIVE STIMULUS FROM WHICH TO CREATE NEW WORKS.

5.10 MARKETING | DISTRIBUTION: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER INTO A COHESIVE VISION

In this section, I briefly describe and show the front-end site whereby all the elements described above, were brought together into a cohesive vision. I will then move onto the lessons learnt during this stage. This period resulted in a wide range of users accessing rich and contextual information about the digital archive and being able to request access to the portal containing the student films. For those that wanted to see the public collection, this homepage took users to the YouTube channel also.

Although the Mediaflux system was hosted on the server system at Research Platform Services, it needed a home page (or a design ‘skin’) with its own integrated URL that connected the digital archive to the film school. I worked with the Faculty’s External Relations digital marketing team to design a clean and easily navigable front-page site to the archive to live on the Faculty website. This can be located here: <https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/digital-archive> and is illustrated in Figures 41 - 44 below:

🏠 Faculty of Fine Arts and Music > Digital Archive



VCA FILM AND TELEVISION DIGITAL ARCHIVE

The VCA Film and Television Digital Archive provides online access, for the first time, to the audiovisual holdings of Australia's oldest continuing film school. The archive is recognised as a University of Melbourne Cultural Collection because of its social, historical, aesthetic, cultural

FIGURE 41 HOME PAGE TO THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE. THE IMAGE WAS CHOSEN DELIBERATELY TO DISPLAY THE DIVERSITY OF THE COLLECTION

AND TO DENOTE A CHILDLIKE CURIOSITY IN VIEWERS AS THEY BEGIN TO EXPLORE THE SITE.³²

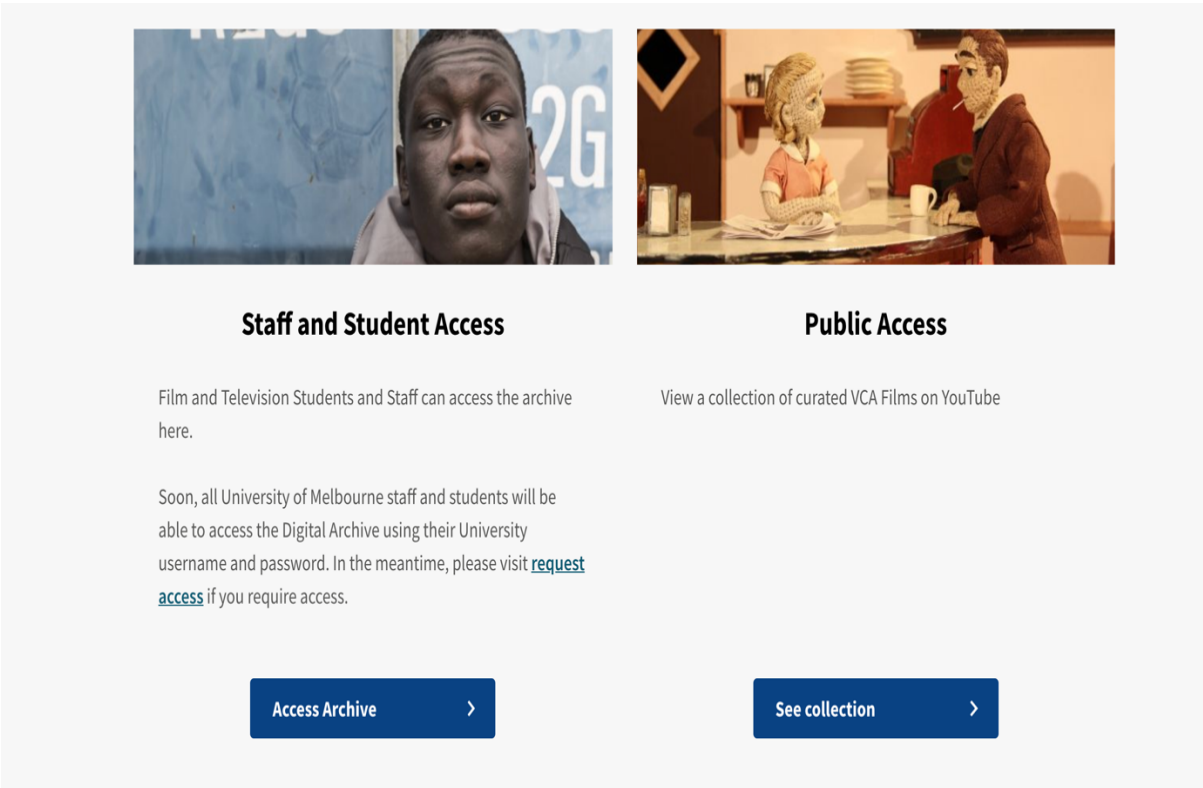


FIGURE 42 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE DISCOVERY PAGE: STAFF AND STUDENT ACCESS TAKES USER TO THE ARCHIVE PORTAL. FOR THOSE THAT DON'T HAVE ACCESS, THEY CAN REQUEST ACCESS PER MENU BUTTON.

³² Image from the VCA student short film, “Kid in the Closet”, by director Melodie Shen (2013).

[access](#) if you require access.

Access Archive



See collection



Our Story

The VCA Film and Television Digital Archive is an online repository of more than 1,850 student films, dating back to 1966. New work is added each year by the University's Film and Television students, making it a truly living archive.

[View details >](#)



Archive Features

Find out more about the learning and teaching features of the VCA Film and Television Digital Archive.

[View details >](#)



Engage

Read articles about, and creative responses to, the films in the VCA Film and Television Digital Archive.

[View details >](#)



Request Access

Researchers can apply to access the VCA Film and Television Digital Archive to view films of cultural, social, and historical significance.



Share your Story

Share your experiences with the VCA Film and Television Digital Archive and its films and have your story published on our site.



Project Contributors

This Project would not have been possible without the tireless effort and support of these contributors.

FIGURE 43 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE DISCOVERY PAGE: THIS SCREENSHOT SHOWS THE DIFFERENT WAYS THAT USERS CAN READ ABOUT AND FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE PROJECT.



University Partners

University of Melbourne Engagement Initiatives Grant
 University of Melbourne - Research Platform Services
 University of Melbourne Student Services Amenities Fund
 University of Melbourne Cornelius Regan Trust Award (Donna Lyon)
 University of Melbourne Cultural Collections and Cultural Collections Placement Program
 University of Melbourne Digitisation Centre
 University of Melbourne - Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation
 University of Melbourne Faculty of Arts - Digital Studio
 University of Melbourne Faculty of Fine Arts and Music

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Faculty of Fine Arts and Music

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FIGURE 44 VCA DIGITAL ARCHIVE DISCOVERY PAGE: AS USERS SCROLL DOWN FROM THE PREVIOUS PAGE, THE PROJECT PARTNERS ARE REVEALED, HIGHLIGHTING THE COLLABORATIVE NATURE OF THE PROJECT.

The VCA Digital Archive Project now had a new digital home in which to hold its many elements. It was supported by and integrated into both the University and Faculty systems, which began to affirm its place in the cultural heritage of the institution. It also went beyond this, drawing on the publicity afforded by the third-party site, YouTube and its ability to reach other audiences.

5.11 LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION STAGE

Building Key Strengths of Each Collaborator Will Serve to Enhance a Project and Better a Collaboration.

This phase had clearly demonstrated that building on each collaborator's key strengths, allowed them to enhance and complement others in the team and wider project. According to film practitioner and scholar Rob Sabal (2009, 13):

Effective collaboration starts with and relies on an understanding of one's own essential strengths and qualities and one's own character and characteristics in the context of the group dynamic. Collaboration flourishes when group members can also spot the qualities and strengths that others are bringing to the team.

Therefore, an individual's strengths can be played upon positively, whilst their limitations can be supplemented through alternative resourcing strategies or seen through the context of working towards a larger project vision. I came to value this viewpoint of collaboration in a greater way through the 'doing' of this archive project. I learnt that mutual trust and respect can become part of a project's framework, allowing each team member to be integral to the project's success. When mutual respect and trust is built, then the potential for misunderstanding and conflict is significantly reduced. As Edwards (2009, 58) affirms:

Key attributes for the success of any large collaboration are open and clear communication among individuals, mutual trust and respect, and voluntary compliance on a shared method for the production process.

As a frame of reference, this enhances the film value chain process. It becomes a philosophical embodiment of ethical ideals and principles that are life-giving and essential to the artistic, research, pedagogical and filmmaking process. As I learnt to embody mutual trust and respect, it connected to the project's conceptual framework of body as archive / archive as body. Knowledge was passed on at each stage of this project, transferring through and by the archive-body/ body-archive and deepening an understanding of my practice.

My understanding of collaboration started to deepen in the development phase of the project. In this stage, I felt that I started to become a “change-agent,” a term coined by Zorich et al (2008, 24) to describe someone who is there to ensure the overall vision (or mission statement) is brought to life. It was through researching the conditions required to ensure a project’s efficacy when working with interdisciplinary partners (evident in screen production research and digital curation literature (see Sabal 2009; Edwards 2009; Higgins 2012; Dooley and Sexton-Finck 2017), that I came to further realise that without mutual trust and respect amongst parties, then a project’s success is made more difficult, less meaningful and sustainable. The VCA-DAP took over six years to complete, so it was important to develop respectful and trustworthy relationships that would continue over the years. I needed to develop partnerships, raise funds, work with volunteers and a variety of stakeholders and continue to find purpose and engagement in the process of creating and making. The knowledge gained here has strengthened my understanding of being a more effective collaborator and producer.

A Balance of Needs: no one size fits all

The Film School desired a system that acted as preservation, curation, access, teaching, and learning platform. We ended up with Mediaflux acting as the primary source of truth (a database solution where all the assets are held), which supported one set of functional activities largely constructed around the archive's research activities (the remit of Research Platform Services). This would enable the film school to distribute content to other platforms later to undertake further activities such as:

- preservation
- teaching and learning
- public streaming

The difficulty with distributing the content to these multiple platforms, is that each of these require a whole new set of thinking around workflows and procedures. This was far outside the scope of my capabilities as a sole researcher in relation to this project and highlights the need for further institutional support. There was a growing awareness of the importance in exploring preservation and digitisation issues within the University of Melbourne. But, if I had waited for the university to have its own preservation system and teaching and learning video platform up and running at the time of project inception, it would have meant stalling the project by three to five years. This would have precluded the Film School from going on a

culturally expansive journey whereby it cemented its reputation in moving image history as the project intersected with so many diverse fields, disciplines and collaborators.

5.12 NEW QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES

This chapter concludes with a set of new questions and challenges designed to encapsulate the ongoing nature of the digital archive as a continuum of my practice and the wider practice of screen work of the VCA Film School.

As the project drew to a finish, I had developed a profound understanding and appreciation of my artistic practice. The multiplicity and complexity of the archive fascinated me. I was continually intrigued by the many narratives that sprung from the digital archive project and the role of archive in culture and society. Like filmmaking, archives have many vantage points and intersect with so many disciplines.

Similarly, the expansive nature of archive as body/ body as archive led to a further shift in viewing the "archive as source to archive as subject" (Stoler 2002, 93). The archive could now be studied, recontextualised, scrutinised, challenged, and used in new artistic modes of practice. There were practical concerns still to be dealt with, for example, how to deal with the masses of information and data in innovative ways, but the archive was now a democratic tool that resided within the custodianship of The University of Melbourne. The project had come into being, but it needed the full support of students and staff (within and outside of the Film School) to ensure it would remain meaningful for generations to come. I began to consider how to fully engage staff, students and researchers to activate and engage the digital archive. Therefore, in the next chapter, I turn to a reflective evaluation of the impact and efficacy of the VCA Film and Television Digital Archive in the areas of pedagogy, research, and engagement to expand on this further.

CHAPTER 6: REFLECTION AND EVALUATION (NEW CHALLENGES)

INTRODUCTION

Just having a good idea, a product, a film, a web series to sell isn't enough. It's not like the compelling message Kevin Costner received in Field of Dreams that told him, "If you build it, they will come." And you can no longer market a product solely by transmitting a common message, because our society is too fragmented, and people are all looking at different things – using a variety of venues for their news, gossip, information and entertainment. So the questions then become: How do you surround an idea or product? How do you ignite the fuse that starts a conversation? Exactly where are you going to find your target audience? How are you going to develop a relationship with fans? How are you going to invite fans to participate? (Honthaner 2010, 439)

This quote offers a glimmer into what this chapter holds. Whilst our target audience was in many ways more in-built than for a film, television, or media product, successfully reaching them was one thing... getting them to use the archive was another. I wanted students and staff to see the digital archive as more than a repository to deposit their work and let it languish there. Instead, I wanted students and staff to view the digital archive as an exciting, meaningful, and engaging platform in which they felt inspired and *wanted to* search for student film works. This desire was realised in part during the marketing and distribution stage, when films from the archive were used as stimulus in which commissioned writers wrote creative and thematic press articles to contextualise the collection.

The research of Kasperowski, Kullenberg and Rohden (2020) takes these ideas much further. They discuss the co-creation of scholarly knowledge within participatory epistemic cultures in digital humanities projects, writing:

Within a culture of participation, questions can thus turn into more collective forms of knowledge building and be combined with a critical engagement with the source data. While researchers often search for specific answers, volunteers ask and answer questions that emerge from their interactions with the material and within the community (Kasperowski, Kullenberg and Rohden 2020, 249).

This potential for knowledge co creation within the field of archives and museums is the focus of the contemporary research of Hetland, Pierroux and Esborg (2020), who argue that research and citizen projects in museums and archives can contribute positively to a participatory and democratic landscape and foster engagement across disciplines.

It is within this chapter then that I turn to an evaluation of the platform and overall project and its impact in the areas of teaching, learning, research, and engagement at the Film School and beyond its institutional doors. I will then offer an appraisal of the platform in terms of its ability to engage users. Finally, I will recommend four key actions that the Film School may wish to consider furthering the opportunities inherent in the VCA Digital Archive Project.

6.1 GOING LIVE: *ARCHIVE FEVER*

The first iteration of the platform was completed in September 2019, with an official launch occurring in October 2019 alongside a public engagement exhibition featuring selected works from the archive, held at the University of Melbourne, Old Quad Treasury Hall. This event sparked a series of engagement opportunities proving quickly that the archive had a Derridian ‘fever’ to it. The University of Melbourne and its New Student Precinct partnered with the youth focused multidisciplinary Arts festival, *Next Wave* in a ‘Moving Image Mentorship Program’. The team put a call out for emerging artists looking to be mentored to produce five screenings for an expanded cinema program at the Parkville and Southbank campus. Students from various disciplines across campus accessed the archive and curated programs based on diversity, representation, and films that “deconstructed modes of representation through montage and camera techniques.”³³

Many of these film screenings combined film, music, composition, and dance amongst other modalities and were held in cinemas, theatres, and exhibition spaces, across campus and at external venues. These events were held by and for students, and I had little to no involvement in them, other than granting access to the archive, affirming the democratic nature of the archive.³⁴

³³ Facebook Events. “Film on Film: Multi-Realities on Screen and Beyond,” October 24, 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/events/745893002524063/>.

³⁴ Curator Milda Valiulytė chose a number of films for the ‘Film on Film: Multi-Realities on Screen and Beyond’ event, such as: *The First Shot* (Kerrie McCure, 1997) 1:41mins; *Alice Through the Glass Lens* (Josko Petkovic, 1976) 1:39mins; *Under the Weather* (Lyn Ashby, 1993) 6:18mins and *Anne's 27th Sense* (Karen Von Bamberger, 1985) 15:12mins, showing an engagement with historical films in the archive.

The digital archive attracted further attention in 2019, with the 10th Greek Australian Short Film Festival Retrospective night, in partnership with the Greek Film Festival, and drew on such films as Ana Kokkinos' *Antamosi* (38 mins, 1991), John Evagora's *296 Smith Street* (15 mins, 2007) and Natalie Cunningham's documentary, *You Know What? I Love You* (10 mins, 2012).

Beyond this, the film school's YouTube channel, now hosting 175 short films, was drawn upon during Covid-19 as part of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music social club. Weekly lunchtime film festival event screenings were held in 2020 and programmed by staff from the Faculty to screen on zoom to colleagues in the social group. Each screening ended with a brief verbal statement from the Faculty staff member about why they picked the films. The reasons were obscure, from staff having personal connections to certain films and filmmakers, to some staff members picking films because they were 'trashy and fun.' Others were drawn to films because of how they used music to tell their stories or for political reasons, including raising the visibility of Indigenous history in Australia through film. The chat function in zoom became a lively and animated space during these screenings, with comments buzzing from staff in the shared virtual and live screening environment.

6.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING IMPACT

The pedagogical value of the VCA Film and Television Digital Archive continues to emerge for students, staff, research community, and screen industry on a local, national and international level. Thus far, the archive has contributed to institutional and public (national) discourse around the need for film preservation and protecting cultural heritage. The connection between the Film School's cultural and audiovisual heritage, the University, and the wider Melbourne filmmaking community were strengthened through industry and workplace opportunities in the digitisation and curation of the student film collection. Over 30 volunteers worked on the project over a three year period, watching and reviewing films, creating metadata, digitising, and creatively responding to the films. Most of these were course related attachments.

In the classroom, for the first time in its history, the VCA Film School staff can easily and efficiently draw on films in the archive to act as exemplars when discussing filmmaking techniques and practices. Students can realistically benchmark their work against the work of others, rather than pitting their work against industry professional films where budget and resourcing are incomparable. Much more than this, the digital archive gives students knowledge of what has gone on before and places their practice and work into a sociocultural context (culturally and technologically). In my experience, students often think of themselves as the first filmmaker who has come up with a story, idea or style of filming. The digital archive situates their work within a broader context, encouraging students to discover, consider and expand past, contemporary and future modes of practice. In addition, it is helpful when students can observe that films made by past students who have themselves gone on to have industry success, may not have achieved any accolades whilst at the film school. This assists students in understanding that artistic practice takes time to hone and that craft is something that continues beyond film school. These are both educational and life lessons that underpin the digital archive, encouraging resilience and reflexivity around creative practice and thinking.

6.3 RESEARCH IMPACT

In 2012, the University of Melbourne published a strategic plan entitled, *Research at Melbourne Ensuring Excellence and Impact to 2025*, which articulated three grand challenges:

1. *Understanding our place and purpose*
2. *Fostering health and wellbeing*
3. *Supporting sustainability and resilience.*

The digital archive project speaks directly to the University of Melbourne's research objectives centred on *understanding our place and purpose* through celebrating and reimagining an historic audiovisual cultural collection. The VCA Digital Archive is an example of an interdisciplinary cultural collection that demonstrates the 'breadth and depth' of the university as a knowledge institution as articulated in the report (2012, 9). As described above, the project engaged with and drew upon the expertise of members within the university, industry, government and community. This demonstrates the global reach of the VCA Digital Archive yet affords the project a distinct "Australian and local dimension" (2012, 9) to be researched. The digital archive continues to foster creativity and contribute to student life and the cultural and social fabric of the research community within the university.

The current archive platform now has the ability for data to be mined in transformative ways. Possibilities include geospatial mapping connected to locations in the films and graphical representations of data related to diversity and representation. Statistical evidence could be researched about the number of films in the archive directed by women, or the number of films featuring and / or made by people of colour. This information may serve to address areas of gender imbalance and promote more cultural and linguistic diversity amongst the film student cohort, creating a talent pool that is more culturally diverse and inclusive for the screen industry sector.

6.4 AUDIENCE AND INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

The VCA Film and Television Digital Archive has been highlighted in public presentation talks where the context of the films and the importance of preserving them offers important lessons regarding preservation and cultural heritage protection. This encourages VCA Film and Television staff, students and the wider industry to critically reflect on the practice of student filmmaking and its contribution to moving image culture and society. The process of engaging with the films and creating metadata, therefore, achieves what Kerrigan and Callaghan (2018, 236) denote as necessary to creating impact in screen production research, by transforming the "lives of those depicted in and working on the film" within the field of filmmaking research. The metadata facilitates potential connections that signify the films' cultural, social, political, and historical value. In this way, the archive positively impacts students and staff's lives because it demonstrates the inherent values in equity, representation, creativity, practice based making, and cultural identity central to the ethos of the film school, the faculty, and the University of Melbourne.

The engagement aspect of the project continues to manifest opportunities. This started with the curated written articles released on the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music news site, creating publishing opportunities for students, staff, and industry to use the archive as a stimulus to write creative and editorial pieces. Through this initiative, the film school YouTube site has grown, attracting over 1,800 followers from around the world. This engagement continues as researchers, staff, and students access the films for Covid19 film festivals, classroom usage, and international research interest (e.g., an access request was granted for The Steve Tisch School of Film and Television of Tel Aviv University, Israel).

The ability to connect films in the archive with the wider community and related industries can now occur. For example, the Film School may consider organising a roadshow screening event of short films for regional audiences to attract prospective students. Further to this, prospective students (local and international) can now request access to the archive or view the public collection on YouTube to find out the style and quality of work being produced at the film school.

As further evidence of the engagement success of the VCA Digital Archive Project, the objectives related to the grant secured by the Student Services Amenities Fund served to address the equity and diversity goals listed in the University of Melbourne strategy entitled *Growing Esteem* (2015 – 2020). In the marketing and distribution phase of the project, we ensured there was a balance of gender and diversity representation in the writing about and curating of films in the archive collection. Specifically, the project committed to representing student groups, cohorts, and campuses through facilitating cross campus connections to Parkville. The project connected with the Faculty of Arts, Department of Veterinary Sciences, and researchers from the University Lenton Parr and Baillieu Library. Students from external institutions also came on board, along with industry representatives, such as a curator from the Melbourne Documentary Film Festival and the Melbourne International Animation Film Festival.

6.5 SUMMARY OF PROJECT IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

The quality, impact and significance of the VCA Digital Archive Project on a local, national and international scale, across the key areas of pedagogy, research and engagement, can be summarised and measured against the following milestones and achievements:

- The successful attraction of funds (across five university and industry grants, including a digitisation investment grant with Film Victoria and the National Library of Australia, with a total investment pool of AUD 375,000).
- Creation of exhibition opportunities at Parkville through the Old Quad ('Discover the Digital Archive'), attracting 2,989 visitors over a four-week period, at approximately 150 people per day.
- Student and staff engagement, including five University of Melbourne students and eight Faculty of Fine Arts and Music staff led film festivals drawing on films from the archive.

- International engagement with the portal as the archive is now accessible via request access to institutions and people from all around the world.³⁵
- Publicity opportunities in national online screen publications; *Screenhub*, community radio, *The Conversation*, and the University of Melbourne's *Cultural Collections* magazine.
- 125 student films publicly released on YouTube (in addition to the 50 films first digitised, making a total of 175 short films available on the channel) with 25 accompanying articles that curate and showcase the archive collection films. There are now over 1,800 channel subscribers with Australia's main viewership and viewer statistics showing a geographical reach in the United States, UK, India, and Turkey (see figure 45 below).
- Reactivation and engagement of the Film School alumni through the VCA Film and Television 50th anniversary, which provided writing and showcase opportunities to feature students' film work and highlight current successes and achievements of the filmmakers within the moving image history of film schools.
- The process of digitising the magnetic tape based media and celluloid film afforded several students from the University of Melbourne and RMIT University the opportunity to gain important audiovisual digitisation experience, which was a component missing from their course work in archival and information management studies.
- Through an Industry Partnership Agreement with The Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), the VCA was able to get the celluloid films in its collection digitised at a low cost rate. The partnership enabled ACMI Collections to purchase a high-end film scanner, which would not have been possible without the funds provided by the VCA. The project allowed ACMI staff to gain vital experience in film scanning at high resolution and improved competencies within its unit. Importantly, it raised the digitisation profile within ACMI as an organisation and more broadly within the sector. This increased profile led to creating the Digital Laboratory as an integral part of the ACMI Collection unit. Working for an extended period collaboratively with the VCA laid the foundation for future collaborations with other agencies, which was one of the cornerstones of ACMI's mission.

³⁵ At the time of writing, there have been two international requests from Film Schools and five local University requests.

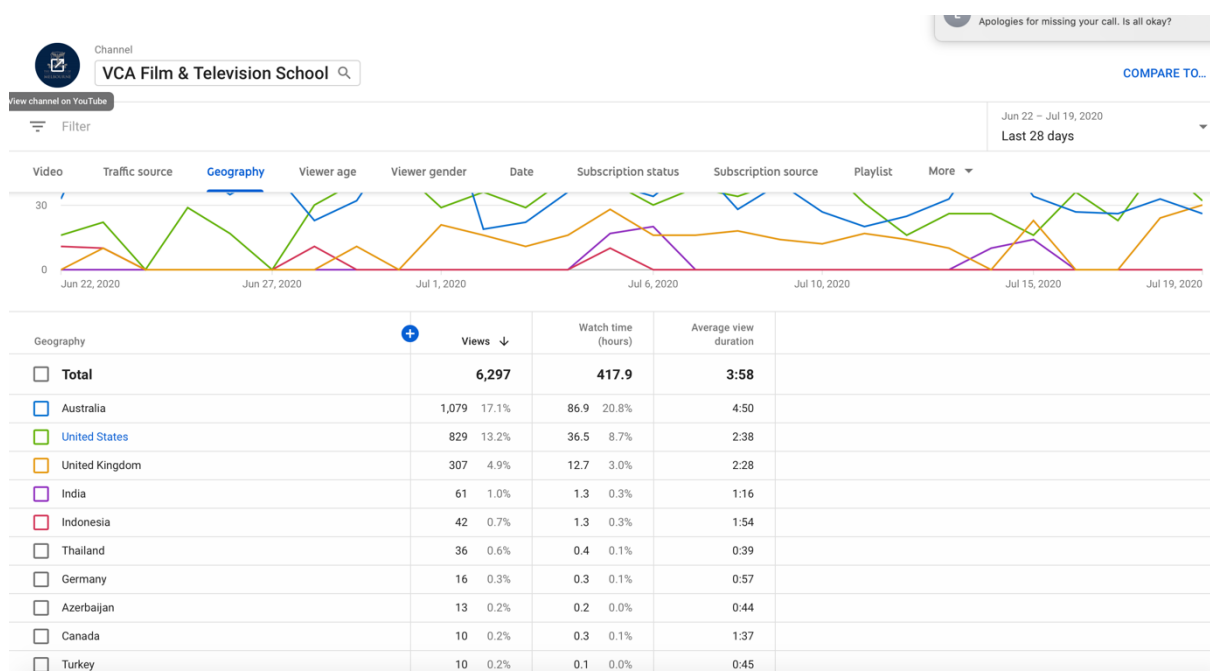


FIGURE 45 VCA FILM SCHOOL YOUTUBE CHANNEL GEOGRAPHICAL REACH STATISTICS AS AT 21 JULY 2020.

6.6 USER ENGAGEMENT

This section offers an appraisal on the effectiveness of the digital archive for its users. Prior to the digital archive site going live in 2019, I conducted an informal small testing session with three students from the Film School. The feedback proved positive, which I later reflected on in my blog (Lyon 2018):

I asked Ryan and Steve what feelings they had when they were searching the site, and although it took them a bit to think of an emotive word, they came up with "curious" and "excited". Ryan said the site was like a library meets YouTube discovery tool. This, to me, really fits the project – I always imagined a site for teaching, learning, research, and engagement purposes. It should be more sophisticated in terms of information than YouTube, but more discoverable than a library database usually is! I think we are almost there.

My research indicates that the VCA digital archive project is the first of its kind for a university student film audiovisual collection of this magnitude.³⁶ The films are now richly connected with metadata, including information surrounding the filmmaker, location, themes, and other creative elements, which has created deeper connections for the users who search the collection. This has been evidenced in my conversations with students and staff members, along with email correspondence from various users.

Due to a workflow pipeline being established for all born digital contemporary works, current film and television students can enter metadata information surrounding their films, along with adding stills and ancillary documents. Never in the film school's history has there been such deep engagement with the student films by the filmmakers and a responsibility placed on the student to 'activate' and engage with their finished work. From 2018, the digital archive contains all the film works made at the film school, including short exercises. This means that students can trace their entire filmmaking trajectory and that of their peers. In the past, the first semester and non-graduate films produced were not accessible by students unless the lecturer had individually kept a DVD to show the material in class.³⁷ This limited the potential of showing student's the wide range of work produced at the film school.

Furthermore, audiences can now access films at any time, on any device, along with viewing historical films that date back to 1966. In the past, access was limited to physical access through the faculty library on DVD, which only contained graduate films from as early as 2002. Some earlier graduate works were available on VHS, but it was rare for a student to borrow a VHS tape to view early works. This new ease of access is more in line with the contemporary student, who is adept at viewing content across platforms and devices. The curated articles and films released on YouTube in 2019 have shown students how their films can be seen beyond initial representations of their intended story and that individual elements can spark ideas or contain a resonance to inspire artistic output and practice.

³⁶ This is based on current research at the time of writing.

³⁷ Capturing all the non-graduating film works pre-2018 was outside the scope of this project. There are some important film works still waiting to be digitised at the time of writing this thesis that perhaps some other researcher may be inspired to take on as a project and further contribute to the archive.

There are still many possibilities for engaging with students to further explore and exemplify the short film and the archive and highlight its ongoing potentiality. The archive may be seen as a container to hold the short film as an artistic object, an object amongst objects. Each element of the short film, its mise-en-scene, actors, locations, setting, costumes, makeup etc. – essentially the metadata embodied in the film – could be used as stimulus or context when creating work. When viewed like this, the possibilities for exploring and exemplifying the short film and its archive become limitless, feeding back into my early research and conceptual thinking about the rhizomatic nature of the digital archive and body as archive/ archive as body. The archive is becoming a truly living and breathing archive as it inspires alternative modes of artistic practice through the works of those who encounter it.

6.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE ARCHIVE

The digital archive has been a success on a multitude of levels. However, as with any creative project, there are always things one wishes they could have done better. In my experience, more time and money can always improve a creative work. In this section, I will discuss two significant limitations of the archive. Despite these limitations, they have led to new challenges and future actions for the film school and possibilities for a postdoctoral research project.

The first limitation is to do with where the archive is housed within the networked system of Research Platform Services (RPS). This networked system supports several data sets, which means no individualised support system to service the digital archive. This has had some repercussions, mostly to do with the number of users able to access the system at any one time (e.g., between 10 – 100). RPS were naturally conservative about usage, as they were worried the system could crash, thus affecting other datasets it looked after.

There was also a conflict of interest in RPS's remit, set up to only support research data systems. The digital archive traversed teaching, learning, research, and engagement, and I was always very upfront about this. After much deliberation, I could reframe the digital archive solely as a research collection. Staff and students drew on the materials in a research capacity to inform their work, and users accessed the collection for research purposes to curate the films for exhibition opportunities. This nuance of nomenclature was critical and caused several

delays in the project as I championed for widespread access to meet the varying needs of the film school and its various users across the domains of teaching, learning, research and industry engagement. In the end, we settled on Mediaflux being known as the ‘source of truth’ – meaning it acted as the digital container in which all the information related to the short films were held. This would then allow for the film material to be siphoned off to other platforms (via relevant coding and internal processes, which as of writing this thesis, are still in development and outside the scope of this research project. This means that to engage with the films for teaching and learning and engagement, the material will be accessed by the University of Melbourne’s new video management system, Kaltura (established mid 2020) (see Figure 46 below).

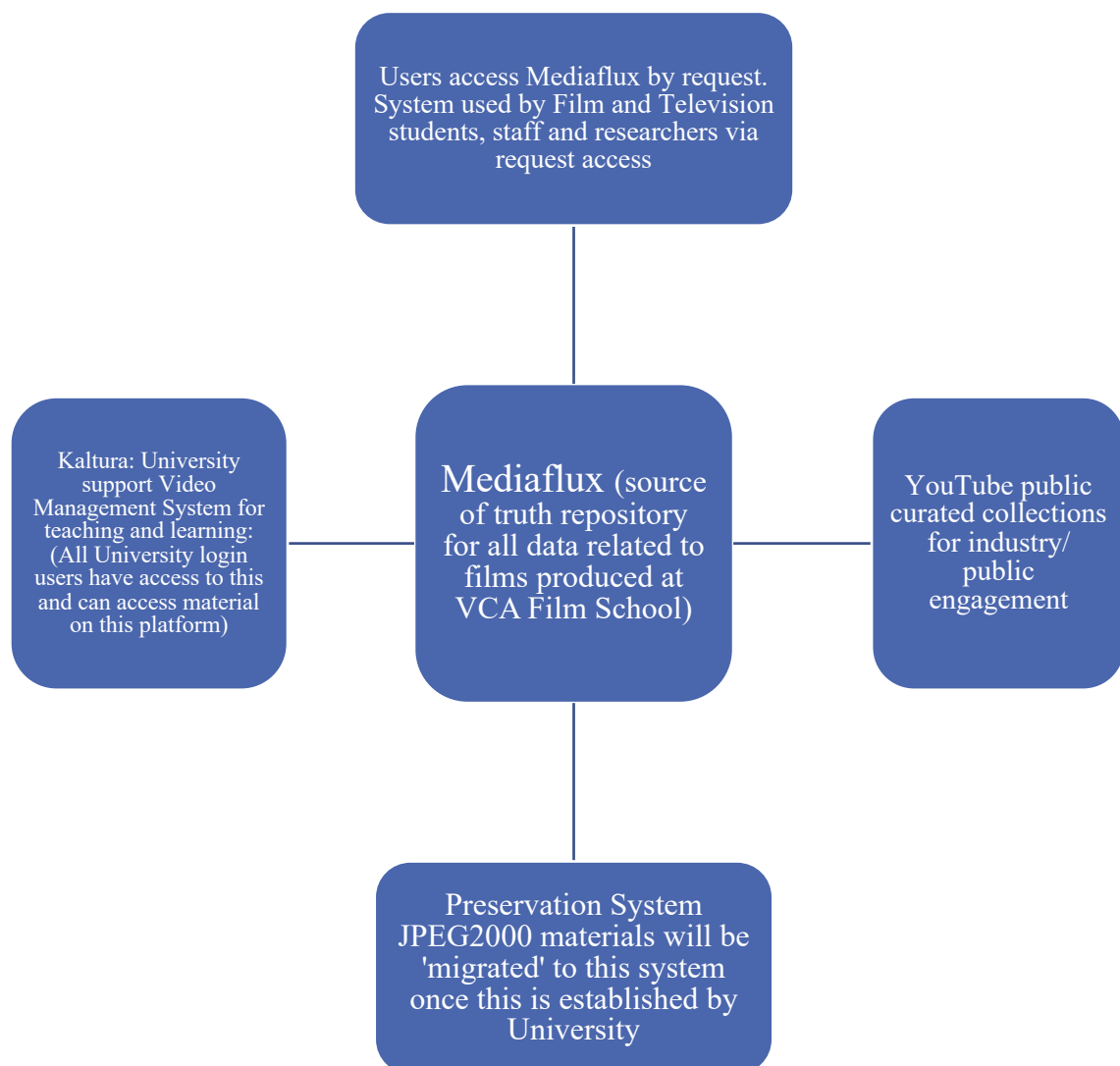


FIGURE 46 THE ABOVE FLOWCHART MAPS THE FINAL DATA MODEL SYSTEM FOR THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE COLLECTION. IT SHOWS FOUR DISTINCT PLATFORMS WITH SEPARATE USAGE REQUIREMENTS.

In late 2019, the University of Melbourne introduced a video management software system, 'Kaltura', which is essentially a campus YouTube style video platform, whereby any user with a university login can search videos produced at the university.³⁸ In many ways, this felt like a duplication of the assets in Mediaflux; however, it has resulted in several benefits that support the film school. These include:

- All University users can search for the collection without requesting access. They can now engage with the materials for teaching, learning, research, and engagement easily and efficiently.
- As of the next site iteration (scheduled for early 2021), students can select to 'publish' their film work to Kaltura. This affords students a sense of control over their 'assets' (short films) and includes them as active participants in engaging with and contributing to university culture.

Mediaflux is only supported through RPS, leaving the collection vulnerable in case the department loses funding or is subject to any institutional restructuring. In many ways, Kaltura (although not a preservation system), offers the film school some security as a potential exit strategy if the support relationship with RPS ends, although the digital preservation copies will need to find a new home.

The second limitation of the project is linked to the site design and functionality of Mediaflux. This was touched on in Chapter Five when I reflected that I took on a pseudo designer's role in developing and designing the digital archive's interface. By not using a design company for this process, I believe the site design's true potential was not fully realised. I would recommend researchers who find themselves in a similar position to work with a design company specialising in human centred design to enhance user experience.

Overall, the feedback from staff and students has been very positive, although students have not responded as eagerly as I anticipated to the metadata's 'diversity' section (this section is shown in Figure 47). This was set up to enhance the search functionalities and enable users to search the archive based on sexuality, gender, First Nations, and ethnicity. This affords

³⁸ Kaltura is still being developed and integrated into the University of Melbourne. The VCA Film and Television audio-visual archive will be coded to and migrated into this system during 2021, with a smaller subset of metadata to assist in contextualising the films.

researchers and the film school important data opportunities to find statistical information related to gender and consider targeting inequities that may present themselves to attract a more diverse cohort.

The screenshot shows a web form titled 'Item type' at the top. Below it is a 'Show apps' button and a 'SAVE TECHNICAL DETAILS' button. The 'Archive Details' section includes fields for 'Archive number', 'Digitiser', and 'Digitisation notes', each with a green plus icon and a 'SAVE ARCHIVE DETAILS' button. The 'Diversity Details' section contains a paragraph explaining the purpose of the information: 'This information will enable researchers to analyse and explore gender, representation and cultural diversity at our Film School. For example, it would be interesting to know how many female directors graduated in 2016 (compared to 1980) or how many trans or Indigenous filmmakers have graduated from VCA film school. Research into these areas can enable us to address areas of underrepresentation so that our graduates can become part of a screen industry that is more inclusive and equitable.' Below this are input fields for 'Gender', 'Sexual orientation' (with a subtext 'Which of the following options best describes your sexual orientation?'), 'Ethnic group' (with a subtext 'What is your ethnic group?'), 'First Nations People' (with a subtext 'Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin?'), 'Home country' (with a subtext 'Which country were you born in?'), and a 'Notes' field.

FIGURE 47 DIVERSITY SECTION IN THE METADATA SECTION. STUDENTS ARE ASKED TO ENTER IN THEIR DETAILS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES.

I had assumed that this would be a valuable addition to the metadata, but because the user was not engaged deeply in the design process (other than through selected conversations with focused students to seek their feedback), this is an area that needs further consideration. Perhaps one way to address this is to provide a dropdown box so that students can add cast and crew to the metadata fields, so it is not just focused on the individual filmmaker. For example, a film may have a trans actor but not a trans director, so the nuances could be better captured this way. A more sophisticated search function and examples of how the data can be used to provide information about diversity and representation, may assist in getting a ‘buy-in’ from student users.

Finally, in the development phase of the project, I conducted a focus group with students. Students affirmed that the strengths of the archive lay in its ability for prospective (local, national and international) students to view works, the ability to see a student filmmakers’

progression and that it would be better than accessing DVD copies of the films from the University Southbank Campus Library. The students suggested several features which are recorded below in the table. I have included comments so that readers can see what was implemented from these discussions, in the actual digital archive interface.

Interface features (suggested by students)	Comments
Credits listed like IMDb	This feature is in the digital archive, however, could be enhanced through user feedback and further site design.
Staff picks	Currently not a feature. This is being explored for the site's next iteration.
Spotlight films, available limited time only	This is a feature in the current site and films can be rotated by the administrator.
Possibly open to film industry	This is available via request access, although would be better enhanced if users could generate a link easily to share with industry.
Create own playlist	This feature is available.
Simplicity in design. They wanted it to look like Netflix or SBS OnDemand.	The digital archive adopts a simple, contemporary sophisticated design interface, in line with current trends,

6.8 NEW CHALLENGES AND FUTURE ACTIONS

The challenge now is for VCA FTV, the Faculty and University of Melbourne to continue this innovation through continual support to ensure that future value creation is made possible. Below, I suggest four future actions that may help integrate this project more firmly into the university so that it is fully sustainable for future generations.

1. Move the platform to a Cloud Based System or University Centralised Support System

The fields of archival science and digital humanities provide a thorough understanding of the essential requirements in preserving, standardising, curating, and distributing audiovisual content, yet none of these fields have provided a one size fits all technology solution that achieves all these things. It is within New Media and Digital Humanities literature that there appears to be an understanding of the need to create technology solutions that are not only a tool for users to search and view films, but act as spaces that allow creators to contribute to and share content, encouraging participatory interaction with audiences (Jenkins 2009; Manovich 2010).

The VCA Film and Television Digital Archive project created a platform that went some way to achieving all these things – preservation and storage; standardised, nuanced, and domain specific metadata; the ability to curate the collection; searchability; functionality and access. The biggest problem lies in where the database is currently housed (it is piggybacking off a system that holds other important data). The digital archive platform may need a new dedicated home, supported by the University of Melbourne with ongoing maintenance and data management support to ensure the sustainability of this important audiovisual film school collection. The current solution sees Mediaflux acting as the main repository for the films and their related assets, enabling students and the Film School to control their film's wider access. In the future, it is likely the preservation copies of the students' films will be digitally stored in a separate university wide preservation system.

I believe the archive is multimodal – straddling the domains of teaching, learning, research, and engagement. To further fragment the collection into other university-supported platforms can minimise the project's overall impact and contribution to reimagining audiovisual archival practice. To mitigate this, the platform could be moved to cloud based storage, like Amazon, which would allow for users to access this (via password) and may result in a more operable and accessible system.

2. Strengthen Departmental Communication about the Digital Archive

The second action I suggest to ensure the VCA Digital Archive is sustainable, is to embed the digital archive project into all communications that the Film School and university is involved in. This research has confirmed that university staff work in busy, complex, and often fragmented environments, often feeling overwhelmed by the number of systems they have to

engage with. Ensuring the digital archive platform is viewed as a cultural treasure within the Film School and University of Melbourne can help build the archive's capabilities within the department and the wider university. Staff and students must become the lobbyists and advocates beyond the institutional doors, creating learning opportunities for curriculum innovation through using and talking about the digital archive. Promoting, discussing and activating the digital archive through specialised events, marketing and word of mouth will assist in creating long-term change and ensuring the digital archive's sustainability as it keeps evolving, with new filmmakers, stories, contexts, and viewpoints. My hope is that it also develops a broader understanding of the significance of archives.

3. Integrate the Digital Archive into Curriculum

To increase the digital archive's value and meaning, another recommendation is to build curriculum development, embedding the digital archive into the everyday teaching and learning space. Students should be assessed on their metadata entries in relation to their films, to ensure there is a high standard and rigour in place once their work is finished. Throughout writing this thesis, conversations have emerged that relate to enhancing the university's physical and digital assets, particularly those that are part of its Cultural Collections unit. The area of Cultural Collections offers rich ideas for stimulating pedagogy and research and has yet to be drawn upon in meaningful ways across our faculty. Examples could be developing a subject that is focused on audiovisual archives, using the VCA Film and Television digital archive as the driver for the curriculum content. Embedding the digital archive into the faculty's research space opens it up for current and future students to become active citizens and co-creators, increasing its relevance for filmmaking and interdisciplinary research and practice.

4. Seek New Leaders for Future Phases

To arrive at the point of having a digital platform with the ability to house, store, and provide access to retrospective and current student film works has taken six years. New champions are now required to ensure the VCA digital archive project remains truly innovative and sustainable. The continual *buy-in* of staff and students will be the real test of whether people find value in the project. There is still much to be done in ensuring a staff member is responsible for checking the input of metadata and films so that information remains up to date and standardised, along with establishing a go-to person when industry or past students require access to materials in the archive. The likelihood that staff and other project champions remain the same is unrealistic as people retire, change positions, or turn their attention to new ideas.

New staff can help implement further innovative solutions and opportunities and ensure the platform is housed with strong enough institutional and technical support. Internal and institutional policy (such as creating Film School policies related to the archive), may also serve to mitigate these risks. It would be advantageous to properly appoint roles and tasks to a staff member or make the requirements part of somebody's job description to ensure accountability.

To summarise this chapter, my interest in this work stemmed from being a screen producer whose primary purpose is to create works that connect to a defined audience. The VCA Digital Archive Project focused on three key factors to enhance its accessibility:

1. putting the films (as digital objects) into context through rich metadata
2. creating stories to enhance its meaning (through the story of the archive and stories about the films and filmmakers)
3. facilitating audience engagement to enrich the content, through written articles, exhibitions, screenings and events.

These factors may be used to measure the impact and efficacy of the Digital Archive in the areas of teaching, learning, research and engagement. Through reflection and analysis, I have illuminated the potentialities and impact of the archive on these areas. Finally, I discussed the limitations and challenges of the archive, offering suggestions to help assist in new imaginings and iterations of the site, so further innovation opportunities can be developed. In the next chapter, I will be concluding the thesis by synthesising the findings from each of the stages of the VCA Digital Archive Project and summarising the contribution of this research to new knowledge and practice.

7: CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

This written thesis comprises a self reflexive and narrative account of the practice of screen producing and how it can be applied to the development and realisation of a digital archive project. The project intended to create new audiences and contexts across the nexus of teaching, learning, research and industry engagement and contribute to the development of practice. It sought to do this through practically examining the stages and challenges in producing a digital archive project for an audiovisual film school archive. Then, through reflecting on how I, as a producer, arrived at new knowledge creation through the process of ‘doing’ (Schon 1983).

Through reflexive methods, such as journaling and narrative storytelling, I constructed an embodied representation from the data gathered, tracing my journey of practice as a screen producer and educator to provide access to an archive of student short films dating back to 1966, that were mostly inaccessible to students, staff and researchers. This practice led inquiry process evolved into a large-scale digitisation, preservation and access project, whereby through collaborating with multiple partners and stakeholders, I developed and produced a ‘living’ digital archive. This has enabled widespread access to the student film audiovisual archive through a public VCA Film School YouTube channel and bespoke digital asset repository and interface (Mediaflux). The VCA Film and Television Digital Archive now holds retrospective and contemporary film works from the VCA Film School and continues to grow each year with all students works now deposited and accessible via the Mediaflux system.

This concluding chapter seeks to synthesise the many reflections and learnings that emerged from the practice of ‘doing’ this research. I will do this through providing an overview of each phase of the production, offering three final propositions for other film schools and practitioners to consider before embarking on a digital archive project. I will then re-explore the notion of the continuum, as found in discourse about records management, applying it to the process of collaboration and filmmaking. Like the records continuum, I have deepened my understanding of collaboration as a continuum and consider filmmaking within a new paradigm

of praxis. I now perceive filmmaking as part of an eco-system that develops and changes over time; viewed within and through multiple contexts. Finally, I will re-explore the complex interplay that developed from the research and show how the proceduralism of the concept of the archive as rhizomatic and as (living) body, brought the project to life. In doing so, this has culminated in the development of my own “living educational theory” (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006), transforming my praxis through a process of change.

7.1 OVERVIEW OF EACH PROJECT PHASE

Through the process of mapping the digital archive to a film project and reflection and analysis on each of the film production stages, I began to develop a clearer scholarly and professional identity. As I formulated propositions at each stage and reflected on the lessons learnt, I was developing a model of praxis, wherein theory met practice. This process evolved into a constructivist approach to my building of knowledge, situating my learning through applied action, and then reflecting on the process to develop an awareness of my experiences.

In Chapter One, I situated the provenance and significance of the student film archive, tracing its early lineage from the Swinburne Technical College (now Swinburne University) to the Victorian College of the Arts and then University of Melbourne and Faculty of Fine Arts and Music. I established my concern with the research project and outlined the key contributions that this research makes to new knowledge.

In Chapter Two, I explored how my own personal journey of connecting with my childhood trauma, at times mirrored the process of re-creating the films in the archive. As I began to piece together fragments of my past, the pieces belonging to the archive started to formulate a larger picture of cultural memory and identity. The literature that I drew on during this time amplified my understanding of archives in general and deepened my interest in making accessible the VCA moving image archive. Not only was the importance and value of preserving student films necessary to our audiovisual history, the VCA Film and Television Archive contributed to wider discourse about digital and audio-visual preservation. This discourse was located within preserving film school audiovisual archives and wider national and global conversations

surrounding moving image preservation. There is an irrefutable need to protect our cultural heritage to protect our sense of who we are and link past to present to future.

Further to this, the establishment of a conceptual framework from which to view the project expanded my thinking about the meaning of the VCA Film School archive in terms of its research impact for the film school and on the development of my practice. The philosophical concept of the rhizome helped to connect my thinking to how the archive could intersect across disciplines and knowledge domains and contribute to conversations about past, present and future. Students are now co-creators in this knowledge creation as they interact and engage with their films and the archive in new ways. As Cormier (2008, 6) points out:

In a sense, the rhizomatic viewpoint returns the concept of knowledge to its earliest roots. Suggesting that a distributed negotiation of knowledge can allow a community of people to legitimize the work they are doing among themselves and for each member of the group, the rhizomatic model dispenses with the need for external validation of knowledge, either by an expert or by a constructed curriculum.

The metadata knowledge attached to the films is useful to the student community because it creates knowledge within a given context. The students continue to contribute to this knowledge creation within the context of their own practice and leave that knowledge (the films they produce) as an offering to the rest of the student body and research community to add to, redefine, reimagine or re contextualise.

The phenomenological concept of 'body-as-archive' and 'archive-as-body' allowed me to insert myself as a researcher into the body of research and moving image works that I was providing access to. The archive was slowly resurrected, becoming an embodied site continually transforming and finding new meaning. As I assimilated and tested new ideas and information, I began to find meaning in my own personal and artistic journey and transform with the collection.

In Chapter Three, I established the many interpretative/ qualitative practices that I drew on to interrogate the process of producing a digital archive. Eventually, I realised that I had been applying a film value chain production model, whereby I was drawing on my experience of taking a concept from idea to screen then audience. Whilst confusing and overwhelming at times, this process of discovery added a richness and depth to my inquiry. I began to appreciate the role of the screen producer and understand the motivation for my actions, beliefs, desires and values.

In Chapter Four, I examined the stages and challenges of development in relation to producing the digital archive. It was in this stage, that I began to reflect on how I was developing my own professional and scholarly identity within the project. I observed a phenomenological transfer of memories occurring between my behaviours and experiences and how they connected to the body of works in the VCA Film and Television archive. I began to develop an understanding of praxis and how I could begin to construct and communicate new knowledge to my community of filmmaking practice.

In Chapter Five, I showed the components of the creative work and walked the reader through the process, decisions and rationale in how I produced the digital archive. I mapped this process specifically to each phase of film production, from pre-production, through to production, post-production, marketing and distribution. By breaking down the project into the phases of filmmaking, linked to an industrial mode of making, I began to see not only the archive's value, but also the project's limitations. I also began to see the value of the role of the producer and the limitations pertaining to this role. By this, I mean that I had been uncritically reproducing the industrial model of filmmaking (Sabal 2009, 7) in the way I approached projects. As I began to critically examine the role of the producer, through a practice-led approach, I began to see my role as being part of a wider socio-cultural and historical context and a learning and research community where I was working with and amongst others. Acknowledging this has meant that I have begun to develop a stronger sense of my identity as a key leader in creating and contributing to arts practice. As Sabal (2009, 8) points out:

Different roles have different levels and spheres of influence, but aesthetic, procedural, and technical choices are widely distributed among the whole collective, and any film is also a product of the film school context in which it is made.

As a film producer, I was a product of the film school context in which I practiced (VCA). In the context in which I learnt at the time, there was no discussion then of the structural history of the industrial model. I continued to operate out of these deeply entrenched structures as I entered the industry and made my way through it. It wasn't until reflecting on each stage and in the writing of this thesis, that I made the process of producing explicit for the first time in my career. This has increased my knowledge of the production process, self-understanding, and awareness of the way I work with others (Sabal 2009, 9) and has made me a better educator and practitioner. I now teach producing students that they are part of a collective process of filmmaking. I advocate what Sabal (8) refers to as "a new kind of cooperative and reciprocal set of relationships." In this context, Sabal is discussing collaborative relationships, but I am referring this to the practice of producing as a whole; the way producers select, identify, appraise and determine projects and the framework in which they then produce.

In Chapter Six, I evaluated the efficacy and impact of the VCA Digital Archive Project across the areas of teaching, learning, research and engagement. Through the digitisation and preservation of the films and the development of film specific metadata for a film school setting, the archive and short films within it now have the potential to be used in many different contexts. For example, if students desire, they can create podcasts related to films in the archive or short film web series showcasing the films in the collection. A deep dive analysis into the metadata related to films in the digital archive, can also draw out interesting historical, social, and cultural data linked to demographics, gender, sexuality, or themes in the archive.

I also discussed the limitations of the archive and proposed future actions to ensure the digital archive became a sustainable solution within the VCA Film School and University of Melbourne setting.

In the next section, I will discuss the outcomes of the project compared to what my initial questions and objectives were, along with establishing three propositions that serve to address the findings in this thesis.

7.2 SUMMARY OF THE CHALLENGES AND OUTCOMES ACROSS THE PROJECT PHASES

I commenced this research as a professional working in a university film school setting with a solid industry background in film producing and production management. I identified a problem within my setting; that of limited access to a 50 year audiovisual collection of student short films. These films were stored on soon to be obsolete media (16mm and magnetic tape based and laser disc media). Motivated by conversations with staff and students, I decided to take action to resolve this dilemma. What started out as a desire to provide easy digital access to these films, turned into a large-scale digitisation, preservation and access project that took six years to complete.

In this thesis, I set about taking action to find out the answers to the question: *what are the stages and challenges in producing a digital archive project for an audiovisual film school archive to effectively become available and useful for teaching, learning, research, and engagement purposes?* Through practice-led research, I discovered that the stages of producing a digital archive project, were aligned to the stages of producing a project for multi-platforms. For example, several digital files for each film needed to be produced to reach the intended audiences. In the areas of teaching and learning, the files needed were web based digital versions of each film (H264). For engagement purposes, such as films featuring in curated film festivals or at special screenings, a high-resolution digital file (ProRes 422) needed to be produced. For films to be available for long term research and future generations, a preservation copy (JPEG2000) needed to be generated.

Because I was dealing with so many films and files and other complex variables, the challenges were aplenty and revealed themselves during each stage of the project. In the table below, I have listed an overview of the challenges discussed throughout each chapter of this project and identified the outcomes that positively arose, helping to create momentum and impact.

Challenge	Outcome
Researching how other Film Schools and cultural institutions manage their own collections	I received a professional development grant to conduct qualitative research overseas at film schools and cultural institutions. I sought to benchmark the project against what other institutions were doing and find out how they managed and provided access to their film archives. From here, I was able to develop a broad understanding as to how to proceed

		with a large-scale digitisation, preservation and access project and began to situate the research within an international context.
Gaining support for the project: arguing for the significance and value of the archive		I sought funding from the Film School to commission a Significance Assessment that affirmed the historical, aesthetic, research and socio-cultural value of the archive. This resulted in the VCA Film School archive becoming part of the University of Melbourne's Cultural Collections Unit.
Finding money: Fundraising through internal and external grants to get the films digitised		With the aid of the former Head of Film and Television, Nicolette Freeman, I drew up project proposals and grant applications to raise money for the project. This resulted in raising AUD \$50,000 from the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music to digitise 50 significant films in the collection and publicise them on the Film School's own branded YouTube page. Freeman and I also secured AUD \$50,000 from Film Victoria as part of a digitisation investment grant. This resulted in partnering with the Australian Centre of the Moving Image who digitised 500 of the 16mm films in our collection. Further grants were also secured that enabled us to redesign the existing film school database that stored information pertaining to the films in our collection. These smaller grants led to me applying and effectively securing an AUD \$250,000 grant from the University of Melbourne Student Services Amenities Fund. One of the purposes of this grant was to make the archive publicly accessible. As I moved forward with the project, I realised that the films needed to traverse across multiple platforms for its different audiences (teaching, learning, research and industry engagement). This culminated in over 150 films being curated and released on YouTube with accompanying written articles to contextualise the chosen films. It also resulted in the design and development of a digital archive interface that would store, preserve and curate the retrospective films in the film school archive (approx. 1750 dating back to 1966) and house the born digital contemporary film works produced by students each year. The digital archive

	could then effectively serve its teaching, learning and research purposes.
Finding partners: securing internal and external project collaborators to help achieve the project outcomes	The project drew together many collaborators across distinct fields and domains of knowledge. Filmmaking is a collaborative medium and as I learnt, so too was the field of archives. Archives intersect with information technology, library, computer and archival science, records management, and curatorial practice. As I led the project, I drew together industry and institutional experts to develop, design and provide access to the films in the VCA archive. The reader can view who all these collaborators are at this link: https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/digital-archive .
Overcoming resourcing challenges	As affirmed by other researchers, the digital archive project was resource heavy. I outsourced the digitisation of the celluloid films in the archive but managed a team of volunteers who digitised the magnetic tapes at VCA Film School. Every film had to be quality controlled, and tech checked by volunteers, and the films metadata created or added to. Films had to be manually ingested into the archive's platform and took endless hours to do so. With the aid of volunteers and technical support inside the VCA Film School and across the University, we overcame technical storage system requirements, bandwidth issues, quality issues with films and more.
Finding the right system to store and provide access to the materials	After the first 50 films were digitised and released on YouTube, I needed to find a digital asset management system to store the other digital versions of the films. Through partnership and collaboration opportunities, the Film School teamed up with Research Platform Services and Arcitecta, to work with their digital repository, Mediaflux. This system needed to be redesigned and configured to effectively store the materials and ensure they were easily accessible for students, staff and researchers. The biggest outcome was of course the release of the VCA Digital Archive, which now houses over 2,100 films and counting. It continues to grow as each film

made by each student is deposited into the system with accompanying metadata and materials.

Creating rigorous, standardised metadata A metadata schema was designed based on Dublin Core Standards. The schema was tailored to meet the unique requirements of a film school, considering property elements that we believed would invigorate and enhance the collection. These included creating a database of crew and cast names searchable like an IMDB database and adding budgetary fields so students could add their project budgets. This would enable students to benchmark their projects against those of their peers. Other metadata elements included fields pertaining to areas of diversity, including gender and ethnicity. These were included to aid research into film school admissions and policy procedures. Importantly, the metadata gave students an opportunity to consider their work within a broader context of filmmaking practice.

Activating the films through engagement opportunities As mentioned, over 150 films were released on YouTube with curated articles by a diverse array of writers who picked films based on themes of personal interest. As highlighted in section 6.5 of this thesis, the digital archive went live at a University supported exhibition and was featured in radio interviews and press articles. Students and staff continue to hold film festivals drawing on films from the archive. Requests to research the archive continue to be granted for film schools around the world and have included requests from Tel Aviv and London Film School.

Maintaining the integrity of the archive The biggest challenge is perhaps to do with maintaining the integrity of the archive. This extends to ensuring the metadata is consistent, that filmmakers continue to add to the rich metadata and that they are accountable for doing so. These are ongoing conversations within VCA Film School and there is more work to be done in this space. By ensuring the archive is valued and supported by staff, it will become the meaningful and long-lasting historical and culturally significant audiovisual archive that it was designed to be. The outcome

related to all of this is of course the digital archive itself. The archive now exists within a global history of student filmmaking and moving image history. Yet, as mentioned, there is more work to be done by myself and/or other researchers to ensure that proper internal procedures are more fully adopted to look after the archive and the films within it so that it is available for generations to come.

As my research question explored, I set out to identify and overcome these challenges through producing this project. Along the way, I discovered the incredible potential and value of the archive through digitising, preserving and providing access to the student films. I also discovered the significance and potential of the knowledges and values inherent in my skill base through deepening my understanding of the role of the screen producer. These further outcomes will be examined in the succeeding sections. For now, the below propositions synthesise the outcomes tabled above into three final propositions. My hope is that these may become useful action steps for producers and researchers who may want to enliven a film school or audiovisual archive.

PROPOSITION 1: DIGITAL ARCHIVES TELL STORIES

The VCA Film School archive's story came together after the commissioning of a significance report, whereby the collection was tested against its social, cultural, historical, aesthetic, and research significance. This information became vital to building a narrative of why the films in the archive were of value and necessary to be preserved and made accessible. This important first step helped build a case as to the question of 'why digitise?', which was needed due to the amount of work and resourcing required to see the project through.

Once we established the archive story, it enabled us to articulate the archive's significance in various contexts and settings to help attract funding and project collaborators. The story could then take on new forms as different grant opportunities required certain strategic objectives to meet their criteria. For example, early funding was sought related to object-based learning to create a relational database with standardised metadata to search the collection. Viewing the films as 'objects' seemed counterintuitive to how I viewed a film. However, positioning the films in this way, as moving image objects and artefacts helped me to reimagine the project and spoke to my developing interest in the notion of the body as archive/ archive as body and the archive as a living, rhizomatic organism.

Whilst frustrating and time-consuming, the need to apply for funding from various sources during the development phase of the project forced the team to hone the narrative of the VCA Film School, its short films and highlight the multi modal potential of the archive. Getting clear on the story served to stimulate and drive the overall project vision, particularly when the project was dense with so much "doing" and activity. It also allowed me to tease out the conceptual thinking underpinning the project. During each stage of the project and throughout this thesis's writing, I inserted myself into the archive's story. This has led to a re-storying and a re-creation of my artistic practice and identity as I have grown and developed my narrative (who I am) within the archive story. This has culminated in an articulation of my living educational theory, which will be revealed below.

PROPOSITION 2: DIGITAL ARCHIVES NEED DIGITAL FRAMEWORKS

In Chapter Two, I refer to some of the standards and frameworks required to preserve, reference, and appraise audio visual works. Digital archive projects are resource heavy, in terms of time, labour, and costs. There are many online resources available from which a digital archive project can benchmark its processes and procedures and ensure it meets best practices.³⁹ There is, however, still a high level of technical expertise required, along with machinery and human resources to complete the work at the highest standards.

Furthermore, for a collection to be truly dynamic, it must be contextualised, which means spending time ensuring the material is quality controlled and the metadata is as rich and meaningful as possible. Moving beyond a simple description of the films subject matter and technical details is vital to drill down into the object itself and consider what elements make up its structure, such as who is in the film, who worked on the film, where the film was set, how it was made technically, logistically, aesthetically and more. In addition, there are other nuanced elements to include as part of the metadata. The VCA-DAP chose to include metadata such as the month and date of shooting (for weather conditions or historical purposes), budget notes, context of how the work was made, the course, and year level to help build useful information for film students and researchers wanting to explore the collection.

Whilst many of the retrospective films in the VCA Digital Archive do not carry this information, the ability to capture this amount of depth in the metadata moving forward means that researchers will be able to mine the data and create geospatial and intercontextual relationships to enrich and evolve the collection. Further to this, it can now be observed that contexts and meanings change. For example, what was considered common parlance in the mid-20th Century is now blatant racism. This speaks to the living and contestable nature of the

³⁹ For further information regarding best practice approaches for digital archive projects, the reader is advised to read “Fundamental Principles of Digitization of Documentary Heritage.”; “Guidelines for Digitization Projects for Collections and Holdings in the Public Domain.”

Along with; “GUIDELINES FOR THE CREATION OF DIGITAL COLLECTIONS Digitization Best Practices for Moving Images.” These documents contain further resourcing and links to other institutions and guides and are terrific resources for researchers.

VCA Film and Television Digital Archive and affirms how this research materially alters the way the collection can be used. Films in the archive speak to cultural and historical ways of seeing society. The student films in the VCA-DAP now provide researchers with the opportunity to ask questions and spark debate about representation, gender disparity and diversity. This questioning is essential to not only understand history, but the world we live in today.

The need to contextualise the collection was an important part of devising digitisation guidelines and frameworks for the VCA Film School and develop a narrative necessary to express the projects' value and critical concern. This is a translatable outcome that has significant potential for the University of Melbourne to utilise for other created collections (for example, historians doing oral histories). As a future project, it would be interesting for researchers to explore what impact blockchain technology could have on the distribution and circulation of these and other film works. It is unknown yet whether the technological functions of blockchain could have a role in archives and how it would change digital preservation frameworks and workflows.

PROPOSITION 3: DIGITAL ARCHIVES NEED DIGITAL STEWARDSHIP

Digital stewardship is a term coined to define the roles of a champion and/or leader in “digital,” perhaps better stated by Merrill (2003, 8) as:

... the responsible use of resources; it is synonymous with managing, administering. If anything, the word implies that the responsibilities extend “over time and over generations”, an appropriate expectation in the realm of cultural resources.

The digital archive project will thrive if individuals within the VCA Film School (and University of Melbourne) become its digital stewards. If the digital archive is collectively embraced as an institutional responsibility, a treasured cultural collection, it stands to remain a significant cultural, institutional resource for years to come. In the development phase, the work involved in the 50th anniversary strengthened the film school’s approach to digital stewardship, yet more work is needed to be done, as evidenced in my concluding recommendations in the final sections of Chapter 6. Whilst digital stewardship may start with

individual and departmental efforts, it must quickly merge into a more strategic and widespread vision and framework by the institution and ideally supported by policy.

To summarise this section, in conducting this research, I have learnt a great deal about institutional policy, structures, change and collaboration. Collaboration is the focus of the next section, as it became a key outcome of the research's contribution to knowledge construction. I came to value my practice through a lens of co-creation, seeing collaboration and filmmaking as a continuum, working within, through and across multiple contexts and knowledge bases.

7.3 PRAXIS IN COLLABORATION: A CONTINUUM

Through the VCA Digital Archive Project, the VCA Film School aimed to create a 21st-century digital space where the different faculties and disciplines could intersect – joining forces with Parkville, the main University of Melbourne campus, so that students could establish cross-disciplinary connections and creative partnerships. This research project has made these desires possible and continues to evolve at the time of writing. A key experience of the journey involved bringing together a passionately interested team in audio-visual collections, who understood how the moving image could work across different disciplines.

Collaboration is at the heart of filmmaking as it was for the digital archive project. Zorich, Waibel, and Erway (2008, 30) view developing collaborative relationships as working along a continuum, firmly stating that it evolves over time, with trust as its prerequisite. I came to value and embody mutual trust and respect as essential requirements in achieving positive collaboration. Although, I felt that I came into the project with a practical and working knowledge of how to collaborate, the reflexive nature of the project developed and deepened my understanding of the principles for effective collaboration.

As mentioned in chapter 5, this started in the development phase of the project, whereby I became a “change-agent,” (Zorich et al (2008, 24) as I began to champion the overall vision and advocate to bring the project to life. Nevertheless, no collaboration is an individualized effort. It is a collective one. Certainly, when making a film, as Sabal (2009, 8) points out, each member of a film crew, acting as an individual or in their particular role, contributes to the

aesthetic, procedural, and technical decisions necessary to realising a film. He goes on to say, “Collaboration in the filmmaking environment is decision and action orientated and assumes the active engagement of all the group members (2009, 11).” Whilst Sabal acknowledges that collaborating with so many people can be complex; within a film school environment, he advocates for reflexivity to be inbuilt into a curriculum to teach collaboration and foster reflexive skills in students. This might be through class exercises or journal writing and setting up regular meetings with team members to check-in and debrief. Through doing this research, I have noticed a considerable change in how I now teach the principles of collaboration and in how I have improved my skills, knowledge and capacity across all areas of my practice.

The digital archive project brought together so many collaborators from diverse disciplines, backgrounds, and experiences. Although there were moments of frustration and tension across the board (no doubt with me in the firing line at many points), the project moved through each phase in a relatively smooth fashion. This mimics the key attributes pertinent to successful institutional and community collaborations as outlined by Edwards (2009, 58), who states that these include; “open and clear communication among individuals, mutual trust and respect, and voluntary compliance on a shared method for the production process.” Zuber-Skerritt (1996, 38) noted the inbuilt reflexive nature of filmmaking as something that may assist educational researchers in making their emancipatory action research more reflexive. This research offers insights into how other researchers may develop their own reflexive skills in projects that aspire to create change and improvement in practice.

Throughout the writing of this thesis, the synergies between action research and filmmaking became increasingly evident. As mentioned in Chapter Three, I oscillated between various modes of action research. I was drawn to critical participatory action research due to its collaborative, social, and educational processes (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014, 19). However, as these researchers asserted, the spiral of self reflection inherent in each step is best achieved when co-participants are involved in each phase (19). As I became the project’s ‘change agent’ and leader (or rather, the project’s producer), the systematic process of self reflection turned into a more solitary process (19). In some ways, this proved problematic as I had bitten off more than I could chew. I needed more time, more money and a bigger team, as I discovered when it came to designing the digital archive portal. However, the process

afforded me a chance to insert myself into the research, through connecting with the film materials, the nature of the archive and my trauma and subsequently starting to write about it.

This also limited the critical and participatory emancipation of the project on a team-based level. However, I firmly believe that the project, through the lens of viewing collaboration as a continuum, not only transformed an audiovisual archive (and the films within it) but myself as a practitioner. I am confident that the many collaborators involved along the way, were also impacted positively as evident in the many outcomes and opportunities the project presented for learning, growth and knowledge acquisition.

7.4 PRAXIS IN FILMMAKING: AN ECO-SYSTEM

Producing screen work is a complex, multidimensional role that seeks to understand the process of creation within its full lifecycle and beyond. I now see filmmaking as part of an eco-system. Within this eco-system, the producer facilitates the filmmaking process in an interconnected way; to assemble the creative, business, financial, legal, and technical parts of a creative process to construct dynamic relationships between all these entities. This results in a film (or project), contributing to cultural heritage, collective memory, and/or film as evidence of work achieved. Over time, this evolves within different historical, sociopolitical and cultural contexts, depending on time, space (platform) and audience. Therefore, this positions the producer as a cultural agent, a co-creator of knowledge building and transfer, within an increasingly global moving image world. This thinking essentially moves the project towards an archival multiverse, in line with contemporary discourse about the nature of archives. Gilliland, McKemmish and Lau (2017) refer to the archival multiverse as:

encompassing the pluralism of evidentiary texts, memory-keeping practices and institutions, bureaucratic and personal motivations, community perspectives and needs, and cultural and legal constructs as one that is expansive and inclusive of the multiple cultural contexts in which archives and records exist (Gilliland, McKemmish and Lau 2017, 17).

Another way of saying this, is that the archival multiverse acts as a 'meta-construct,' to encourage new paradigms of thinking that move beyond single fixed perspectives Gilliland (2014, 257). As much as this thinking is connected to archives and records, the “mutable

nature” (McKemmish 2002, 334) of archives and records, means they are intertwined with information, communication and digital technologies and concern issues in culture and heritage. This must then encompass the moving image as record of history. Therefore, I believe these ideas are pertinent to the role of the producer. The producer operates strategically and systematically to develop and create artistic works that will sit within the moving image canon and record of time. Film, as artistic work, will often end up in archives and, like archives, rely on principles of "collaboration, cooperation and layering of expertise and other resources," which influence and impact the perceptions and trends of society, individuals, and communities (Gilliland 2014, 257). Filmmaking as an eco-system can therefore be illustrated as:

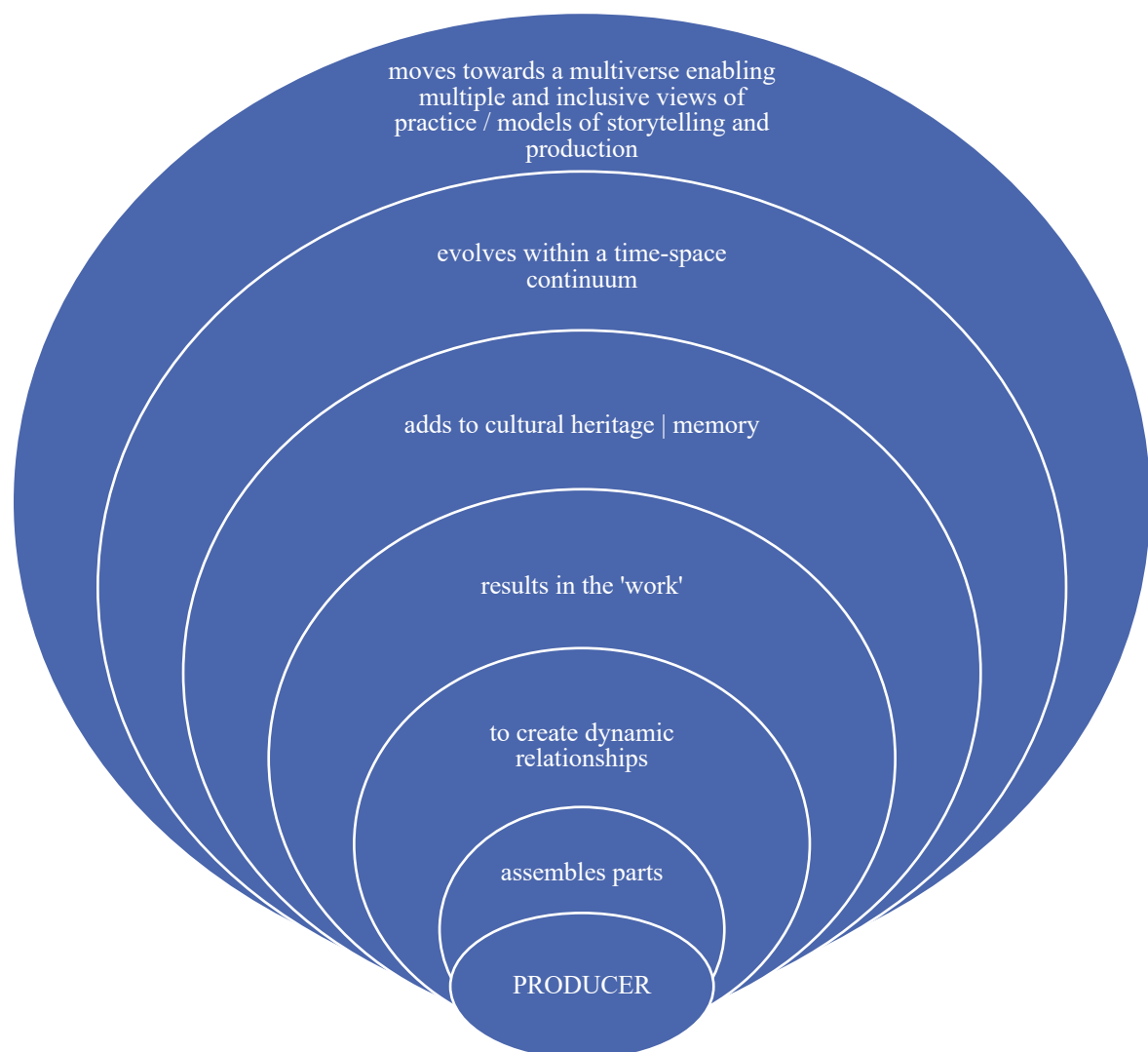


FIGURE 48 THE FIGURE ABOVE REPRESENTS AN ECO-SYSTEM OF FILMMAKING, TO ESTABLISH THE FILMMAKER AND THEIR WORK WITHIN A BROADER CONTEXT THAT EVOLVES AND TRANSFORMS OVER TIME.

7.5 MY LIVING EDUCATIONAL THEORY

The term 'living archive' leaped out at me early in the project. The phenomenological roots of body as archive/ archive as body related to the repressed memories held within me from early childhood sexual abuse and trauma. The idea of bringing to 'life' a collection that was in many ways dead became an enlivening process of self exploration and self-transformation. I 'grew' and evolved in producing this project; I began to reclaim these memories and re-story my trauma. Through bringing into existence the films (and memories) of others, I brought myself into a form of new existence and perception.

Ontologically, I came to understand my way of *being*; my values were rooted in the embodiment of knowledge; *knowledge in action*, and *knowledge in doing*. The pragmatism of Dewey and Schon affirmed my modus operandi as a reflective practitioner. The methodologies I drew on, embodied my praxis, combining action with theory to expand, refine and develop my scholarly identity. Action researchers Whitehead and McNiff (2006, 25) state that it is through the inquisitiveness of wanting to improve one's own practice, that spurs many action researchers to pursue such projects.

And so, it was for me. The questioning of my practice and the institution's practice (the way the Film School managed the films in its archive) led me to develop a theory of knowledge; an epistemology that has enabled me to articulate and justify my values and beliefs. Naturally, this has transformed the way I look at pedagogy and how I teach. Like Whitehead and McNiff (2006, 26) observe, articulating my values and beliefs can now "encourage others to interrogate their own assumptions, and the normative assumptions of their cultures, in search for more inclusive and relational ways of living."

In many ways, I began to embody some of the values linked to discussions around archives and recordkeeping. These values focused on identity, access, justice, authenticity, memory and reliability (McKemmish 2002, 334). The "mutable" nature of the archive (McKemmish 2002, 334) appealed to me, as I too was always in a "process of becoming (334)." The records continuum model encouraged me to reflect on my practice as a producer. I learnt to value

screen producing as a legitimate, authentic, and reliable mode of method in practice and in developing and producing the archive and screen content.

Both living archive and living theory are therefore 'alive', generative, and evolutionary. The producer can produce themselves; encouraging an embodiment of praxis; that is life-giving – not just through the making of cultural 'objects' (screen works) and their interaction with the audience – but through the making of themselves. This results in their interaction with the world, to become a more ethically engaged and active citizen who is aware of their privilege, power, and personal agency. The idea of a filmmaking continuum (as illustrated in Figure 48 above), establishes the filmmaker's work within a broader context that evolves and transforms over time. This is vital for a filmmaker/ artist to realise, to fully hone and celebrate their artistic practice on a personal, socio-cultural, historical, and political level that moves it beyond the technical and aesthetic.

The living archive is now representative of myself. Through this, I have articulated a living theory, which follows in the vein of Whitehead and McNiff (2006, 24). They describe their own values and their ontological, epistemological, methodological and social purpose, which values people's ability to arrive at knowledge in their own way and to construct their own meanings in their own time (24). Through constructing this digital archive project and in writing this thesis, I have come to this belief also. Whitehead and McNiff (2006, 24) describe their ontological values as "flows of life-affirming energy through which we give meaning and purpose to our lives (2006, 24)." Like Whitehead and McNiff, I do not believe that people need to be told what to think; rather, learning is a process of discovery, of self, within bodies of knowledge, which can transmute or transform new modes of creative praxis. From this space, the process of 'doing,' I now see that embarking on research enables me to embody knowledge within bodies of knowledge. This is a phenomenological understanding of self.

Further to this, I am newly committed to a "social purpose of promoting equality and democratic practices" (Whitehead and McNiff 2006, 25), where I aim to respond and critically engage with systems, discourses, and practices that reinforce power and privilege, most often at the deliberate exclusion and alienation of people. Like Whitehead and McNiff, these social values have transformed into my pedagogical values, as I am now actively encouraging others to interrogate their own assumptions, and the normative assumptions of their cultures, in their

search for more inclusive and relational ways of living (25). These ways of living now form my epistemological stance, enabling me to link these to rationality and knowledge assumption (25). A living theory therefore seeks to embrace social values of sustainability, inclusivity and a loving world to empower and return agency to those who have lost it (25). These are values that I strive for, whilst accepting that I am human and therefore I am a contradiction (25). Despite this, like McNiff and Whitehead have discovered through their research journeys, I can now test my actions through the projects that I choose and how I choose to live against these values.

7.6 FINAL THOUGHTS

This project has drawn together all facets of my practice and experience – from my negative childhood experiences to my undergraduate studies in performance art, through to my experience in producing short films and online content, through to my professional role within the University and subsequent shift into academia, teaching and research. It is, in some ways also, an archive of my life.

The digital archive project is now a gift, an offering, for audiences to do with it what they will. In this way, the project is truly democratic and emancipatory, but at the same time lives within the contradiction evident in a living theory; that is, that humans are full of contradictions and strive for an ideal but do not necessarily achieve it. Because the project sits within an institution, it is more than me. It requires institutional support and the community within it to participate and get involved.

According to Zuber-Skerritt (1996, 83), the aims of an action research project should be to "bring about practical improvement, innovation, change or development of social practice, and the practitioners' better understanding of their practices." Through pragmatic action research, reflexivity, and applying my skills as a screen producer, I believe I have achieved this and more. In producing the digital archive, I not only attempted to re-create the artefact, but I also attempted to re-create myself. This has not been about achieving some ideal state, rather it is more about what Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014, 245) ask:

The tell-tale signs of whether something or someone has been emancipated yet, is answering the question 'are things better than they were?', not, 'Are we emancipated yet?.'

When I ask myself this question, then I respond with a resounding YES. Things are better for the VCA Film School and for me. However, this is not a finite journey; hence the idea of a living theory fits in with the living archive and the final proposition of a filmmaking continuum as illustrated above.

Through this research, it has been my firm realisation that that the process of change is cyclical, reflexive, critical, and a lifelong learning process. It is how Zuber-Skerritt (1996, 95) describes the process of action research, stating that it:

... needs to foster critical, double-loop learning to effect real change and emancipation, not only for the participants themselves but also for the organization as a whole.

Finally, in producing this project, I most aligned with the pragmatic research of Winter and Badley (2007, 5), whose poignant reflection is one that I aspire to continue to put into action:

To engage in 'production' is to create a positive role for ourselves in the natural and social world. Furthermore, in producing value for the world, we at the same time produce our own selves as valuable beings. There is thus a sort of dialectic operating. My work generates value and harmony out there in the world. At the same time, my involvement with external materials and other people transforms my own being, creating the experiences that incrementally build up my knowledge of materials, objects, people, and my own capacities in different situations.

The VCA Film and Television Digital Archive Project has aided the growth, identity, and bodies of knowledge belonging to a Film School, a Fine Arts and Music Faculty, and a University and all those it engages with. The process has emboldened in me a deep understanding of myself, achieved through "doing" the work and cyclically reflecting on it. The digital archive project has deepened my awareness and appreciation of the people involved in it and how together we have transformed learning and living through pedagogy, research, and engagement.

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