Detour Off the Superhighway:  
*Media, Aura and Filmic Practice*

by

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Abstract

In 1911, efficiency expert Frederick Winslow Taylor asserted that ‘in the past the man has been first... In the future the system must be first’ (Carr 2008, n.p.). As a result of experts like Taylor, the art of filmmaking has become synonymous with a modern utilisation of the internet and the most contemporary digital media equipment (Weil 2002).

This research project challenges the trend towards the modern through the production of a documentary, which shows the researcher surrendering the use of modern media and communication technology for eighty days. Selecting eight technological signposts in time, starting at 2004 (with the prevalence of DV Video) and ending at 1822 (with the advent of the diorama, prior to the first stages of photography), the researcher documents the utilisation of technology from each period and explores the consequences of ‘going offline’ in the modern world.

Additionally, the film highlights the experience of modern technology as a contemporary filmmaker and consumer today. Along with the recent rise of ‘communicative’ Web 2.0, ‘co-operative’ Web 3.0 (Fuchs 2008, pp.125-126) and consequential media convergence and Transmedia Storytelling, a number of theorists have begun exploring the effects of such technology (Carr 2010; Honoré 2004).

At the beginning of 2010, a group of German theorists wrote ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’, which calls for, among other things, filmmakers to resist the immediate nature of the internet and to create perfect, discursive, dialogic and social media (David, Blumtritt & Köhler 2010). Other theorists have highlighted the detrimental neurological effects of the internet (Carr 2010). The examination of these theories, combined with the production of the documentary developed through an autoethnographic framework, will form a meld of theory and practice that explores the modern principles initiated by thinkers like Frederick Winslow Taylor that are reflected in the current technological age.

Keywords: Aura, Collaborative Content Production, Convergence, Diorama, Documentary, Ethnography, Film, Media, Modernity, Photography, Practice-led Research, Remixability, Slow Media, Transmedia.
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Patrick Kelly

30th August 2013
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Chapter One: 
Introduction

This project will examine the methodologies, epistemologies and theories surrounding the areas of media, auratic experience and filmic practice that guide the creative practice element, a documentary entitled *Detour Off the Superhighway*. This feature-length film is autobiographical in nature and explores the creative process of filmmaking, how its forms and styles have developed since its invention and how these developing forms and styles have impacted my own practice. The art of filmmaking has become synonymous with a modern utilisation of the internet and the most contemporary media equipment, with digital technology ‘permeat[ing] the entire culture’ (Weil 2002, p.523). This research project questions the adoption of this modern trend in an experiment that sees the researcher documenting the utilisation of technology from eight traditional technological signposts in time over a period of eighty days. Using camera technology as the main point of inquiry, the experiment begins with the prevalence of Digital Video in 2004 and ends prior to the early stages of photography in 1822. In doing so, the autoethnographic experiment informs the production of a film that explores the experience of using these technologies, as both a practitioner and a consumer identifying advantages of using one over another. The film gives prominence to the consequences of ‘going offline’ in the
digital era, thus highlighting the implications of modern technology in the field of media and communication today.

The conceptual framework employed in this study has been established through a combination of the following elements: a critical analysis of a number of academic readings within the fields of modernity, cinephilia, aura, memory, as well as both new and Slow Media; a contextual analysis of various creative works; and a critical reflection on the creative practice element of the project. The research questions that this project addresses are:

- *What are the implications of a modern filmmaker utilising traditional media technologies ahead of contemporary equipment?*

- *How has the modern idea of placing newer media technologies ahead of older ones developed?*

- *Has this modern idea been challenged before? Why?*

Since I began using motion picture cameras in primary school in the late 1990s, camera technology has taken several incarnations. The first cameras I used recorded to VHS. By the time I became a filmmaker in my undergraduate studies just prior to 2006, however, my colleagues and I were mostly using Digital Video (DV) devices. From Super 8 and VHS cameras through to DV and eventually to the current Hard Disk Drive (HDD) equipment, filmmaking methods have been largely shaped by the technology used by creative practitioners and consumers (Weil 2002, p.523).

As a consumer, I have always had a fascination with audiovisual technology, beginning as a child with an idolisation of my parents’ VCR and, later, the internet. My interest in the way one uses technology has been a driving force behind this project, as well as a key topic explored within this project’s creative element. When I began this inquiry, I could not resist the urge to explore where such technology was heading in the future, but it soon became apparent that I could not complete an investigation into the future of technology without additionally examining the technology of the past.
Reflective research methods are imperative when examining areas concerning Modernity, for, as Calinescu famously said, quoting Sir Isaac Newton, ‘If I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants’ (Newton in Calinescu 1987, p.17). The practice of filmmaking is inherently dependent on technology. Improving the versatility and User Experience of these technologies has been a convention within the field since its inception. For instance, Weil cites the Sony Portapak™ as giving ‘way to a whole range of experimentation with the moving image in the arts’, thus revolutionising the industry (Weil 2002, p.523).

As this project will demonstrate, there is an overwhelming trend for filmmakers and other creative practitioners to utilise the most modern forms and styles available to them in their work. There are, however, other voices in the field, such as Slow Media advocates Sabria David, Jörg Blumtritt and Benedikt Köhler (2010) and Jennifer Rauch (2009, 2010, 2011), that call for a more ‘thoughtful and deliberate’ mode of practice and encourage practitioners to, perhaps, opt for more traditional technologies in order to obtain a more auratic experience. On the subject of aura, it seems that the concerns of the Slow Media Movement resonate with the concerns raised by Benjamin, specifically in his essays ‘A Short History of Photography’ (1931) and ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1935). This project highlights the historical ambiguity surrounding the term, beginning with a discussion of Benjamin’s vague definitions and leading to a study of works by Bolter et al. (2006), Quandt (2009), and Schutt and Berry (2011). Initially, when Benjaminian theories are considered, it seems the quest for an auratic experience precludes the use of modern technology and that one must seek out more traditional media to achieve it. As I recognised this friction between the modern and the traditional, while also considering my own creative practice, the central question of this research inquiry became: How can a filmmaker produce a film that challenges the modern ideal of placing new media ahead of older technologies?

This study aims to demonstrate a relationship between Bennett and Wollacott’s (2002) methods of textual analysis (highlighting the intra-textual focus on the text and the strengthening of this discourse through extra-textual influences), as well as a careful blending of theory and practice through practice-led research.
This methodological approach of practice-led research has been chosen to open an informative dialogue between my research and practice but also to expand ‘the range of communities in which the work can stimulate dialogue’ (Gergen & Gergen in Haseman 2007, p.149). This exegesis elaborates on the conceptual frame for the documentary. Its reflective component, in particular, addresses the methodological ‘dialogue’ that stimulated the creative component of this work.

This exegesis follows what Hamilton and Jaaniste refer to as a ‘connective model’ approach, in order to ‘overtly connect the creative practice and its processes with its broader theoretical and practical contexts’ (Hamilton & Jaaniste 2010, p.39). They are vehement that this model is not simply a coupling of the theory and practice, but rather a delicate meld in which the reflection of the creative practice element is highly contextualised among the theories and practices within the field. It is for this reason, combined with the autobiographical nature of this project (both in the creative element and in Chapter Three of this exegesis), that I will draw on the first person form of address throughout this exegesis.

Chapter One is an outline and clarification of the project. It clarifies by defining terms and concepts as well as providing an overview of the historical resistance to modernity, including the Slow Media Movement. The methodological approach and aims of the study are established, as are key theorists and practitioners. The chapter identifies this project’s concern with the experience of media and the impact of technology on that experience. The rise of media projects that harness the crowd-based potentials of Web 2.0 calls into question the quality of those experiences.

Chapter Two establishes the project’s theoretical framework, by providing a contextual review of the focal literature and creative works relevant to the investigation. Key critical arguments regarding the methods used by contemporary creative practitioners utilising modern technologies such as the internet are also introduced. The chapter also explores the experience of these technologies and the criticism of the validity of such experiences, including the views held by advocates of the Slow Media Movement. In offering a background to the field, I examine the work of such theorists and practitioners as Walter

New media theorists and practitioners such as Henry Jenkins and Kelly Chapman attest to the rapid development of the internet, with Chapman proclaiming in 2010 that there had been more change to the online video industry in six months than in the previous six years (Chapman 2010). Similarly, in a discussion of what he calls ‘digmmodernism’, Alan Kirby points to how the computerisation of text, the rapid nature of the internet and anonymous, social and multiple authorship are all factors that have led to a new era of media creation (Kirby 2009, p.2).

Improvements to technology provide the world with larger bandwidths, resulting in greater potential for the creation and distribution of high-resolution online video at little expense to content creators. Graham writes that ‘previously, the costs of distributing films had prevented independent filmmakers from reaching a larger market, thus reducing the possibility of earning recognition and funding for potential future projects’ (Graham 2012, p.4).

These new capabilities have seen filmmakers begin to utilise websites, including Youtube.com and Vimeo.com, as an inexpensive method of distribution. Such websites, most notably Hulu.com, which in the past have merely been used as a site for distribution, are now beginning to produce their own content (Elliot 2010). These developments are now beginning to attract traditional filmmakers to create online content, particularly for long-form advertisements, such as Spike Jonze’s I’m Here: A Love Story (2010) for Absolut and Wes Anderson’s Candy L’Eau short films (2013) for Prada, the latter shot by Oscar-nominated cinematographer Darius Khondji. Weil confirms the exponential adoption of digital modes of production and distribution, writing that such technology:

‘is mass produced, and is consequently becoming readily accessible to everyone, including artists. Equipment is improving, not only terms of its versatility, but also with its ease of use. Work from recent
years reveals the extraordinary new spectrum of possibilities brought by this new device: the personal computer...


One work I will discuss during the contextual review is Spike Jonze’s I’m Here: A Love Story (2010), for which the director partnered with alcohol purveyors Absolut Vodka to create ‘branded content’ that harnessed the capabilities of social media to enhance the experience for the viewer. Indeed, after ‘communicative’ Web 2.0, the internet is now on the verge of a ‘co-operative’ Web 3.0 (Fuchs 2008, pp.125-126), resulting in an increase in social networking and innovation throughout the web by companies and consumers alike. These technological developments have had an enormous impact on the methods of filmmaking, as well as the experience of the filmmaking process.

It is not just the production and distribution stages of media creation, however, that have been transformed by the opportunities presented by social media. Channels of project funding have also been affected. In 2009, social crowdfunding web site Kickstarter.com was launched in the United States, expanding the possibility that filmmakers seek finance from sources other than traditional investors or government bodies. 2010 saw the introduction of its Australian counterpart, Fundbreak.com.au (later renamed Pozible.com). In order to maximise the potency of their crowdfunding efforts, filmmakers are increasingly utilising social networking websites, such as Facebook.com, Youtube.com and Twitter.com, thereby establishing their fan bases before their screenplays are even written (Perryman 2008). In some cases, the fans even contribute to development, including the creation of the screenplay (Joutsen et al. 2008, p.142). This method, termed ‘collaborative content production’ (Joutsen et al. 2008, p.141), is key to ‘media convergence’. These methods of convergence and participatory communication have a long history, of course, stretching back to the fan-created content based on the Doctor Who (1963) television series (Perryman 2008, p.24). Convergence has reached a point where most modern films and television shows have their own blog, mobile application, computer game, Facebook profile, Twitter account, online web series spin-off, graphic novel or other merchandise. Transmedia has also seen creative projects expand across several media, with each medium integral for the user to experience the
entire story. These are the trends being set through the arrival of modern technologies in the media industry.

It is in response to these modern trends that the Slow Media Movement has emerged. In January 2010, David, Blumtritt and Köhler wrote ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’, which calls for, among other things, content providers to aim to create perfect, discursive, dialogic and social media (David, Blumtritt & Köhler 2010). Rauch, another academic who espouses Slow Media, writes that:

‘… Slow Media can be understood as both a philosophy and a practice: First, it represents an appreciation or re-appraisal of “heirloom” forms of media, such as print or analog[ue], and questions popular desire for ever-more information and ever-faster communication. Second, it espouses the practice of “slowness” in media production and consumption, which shifts usage toward slower mediated (or even unmediated) activities, often by temporarily or permanently reducing one’s time spent with digital networks and devices’

(Rauch 2011, n.p.).

Rauch, as well as other theorists and practitioners (Osterhout 2010), has embarked on what she refers to as a ‘Slow Media Diet’. Projects such as Rauch’s have a strong focus on the viability of Slow Media as one’s approach to consumption of media. My project, on the other hand, has a focus on the experience of a filmmaker and is an exploration of modernity’s roots in the development of filmmaking technology and the experience that such technologies create for the viewers, creators and subjects of the images created by said technologies.

The examination of the experience of a filmmaker has a strong relation to a key point in ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’, which insists that works have a ‘special aura’ or feel about them. This concept, in turn, evokes the famous theories of Walter Benjamin and his own insistence that art in the age of mechanical reproduction is devoid of aura (Benjamin 1935, p.3). This seemingly problematic opposition will be explored in detail during the second chapter of this exegesis, encompassing an analysis of theories surrounding aura, memory, loss, experience
and context through the works of Benjamin (1931, 1935), Bolter et al. (2006),
David et al. (2010), Quandt (2009), and Schutt and Berry (2011).

Chapter Three delivers contemplative understandings of the process of creating
the feature-length documentary *Detour Off the Superhighway*. Just as the second
chapter offers insight into the work of other theorists and practitioners in the field,
the third chapter examines the production process of the documentary and
demonstrates a reflective exploration into the workings and findings of this
project’s creative practice, through my own challenging of historical filmmaking
trends.

It is in this chapter that I recount my approach to the production of the
documentary: from the mapping out of the *Detour Off the Superhighway*
experiment, to the process of filming, as well as planning the structure and editing
of the completed film. I also discuss how my practice forms a meld with the
contextual review and how discoveries made during the production of this
project’s creative component, such as the auratic experience of my grandparents’
photographs, inform the wider project.

In recalling this creative process, I explore the theory of documentary filmmaking.
Megan Cunningham, in her book *The Art of the Documentary*, highlights the need
to study the practice of documentary filmmaking because of questions of
subjectivity (Cunningham 2005, p.3). In doing so, I cite a number of documentary
models, such as Morgan Spurlock’s *Super Size Me* (2004), and Lars von Trier and
Jørgen Leth’s *The Five Obstructions* (2003). Cunningham also writes about the
‘importance of the personal relationship between documentary directors and their
subjects’ (Cunningham 2005, p.8). Because I am the subject of my own
documentary, this personal relationship is of less concern than the ‘doubly self-
fashioning’ creation of an on-screen persona, in addition to the documentary itself
(Clifford in Chanan 2007, p.249). Rather, the concern is to adopt a reflexive
position towards the subject matter.

Due to the autobiographical nature of *Detour Off the Superhighway*, it is
necessary to examine the accuracy of events depicted in the film and my own
influence as both director and subject. There has been much discussion on the
increasingly common subjective nature of documentaries by theorists such as Stefan Jarl (1998) and Brian Winston (1995). In the past, documentaries shunned subjectivity, instead opting to strive for objective truth or actuality (Jarl 1998). This trend has changed, with documentary filmmakers acknowledging the unfeasibility of achieving objective truth in their work, preferring instead to claim their films as a subjective version of reality (Jarl 1998, p.149). Pure objectivity is increasingly thought to be a flawed notion in documentary practice (Winston 1995, p.11). *Super Size Me* (2004) and *The Five Obstructions* (2003), for example, are both highly acclaimed films while being simultaneously subjective and autobiographical in nature. As I expand on in the reflective chapter, I found that my own process of documentary filmmaking acts as a form of autoethnography. Hammersly and Atkinson write that ethnography:

> ‘involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research’


This method, applied to the recording of myself, allows me to visually record the process of my creative practice and therefore, perhaps, retain an element of transparency within *Detour Off the Superhighway*, ultimately enhancing the experience of the film. Of autoethnography, Ellis writes that it is ‘... research, writing and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection’ (Ellis 2004, p.xix). Hence, it is my combination of traditional qualitative research, creative practice-led research and the ‘doing’ of autoethnography that allow me to come to informed, self-reflexive conclusions in both the exegesis and the film.

While these elements of the project form an inextricable meld, I must also stress the importance of recognising the blurred distance between them, for while the autoethnographic act of documenting the eighty-day experiment was key to creating the documentary, the film does not claim to be an ethnographic film.
Some theorists may recognise similarities in its form and compare them to evocative autoethnography; what Ellis and Bochner describe as a mode of storytelling that is ‘akin to the novel or biography and thus fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature... the narrative text refuses to abstract and explain’ (Ellis & Bochner 2000, p.744). The attribute that sets my film apart from evocative autoethnography, however, is the use of traditional filmmaking techniques such as mash-up, satire and parody – techniques that will also be discussed in the third chapter of this exegesis. The film is therefore a documentary that utilises autoethnographic processes in its creation.

By examining such techniques and theories within the practice of documentary filmmaking, as well as the theories behind the subject of the film, I have produced a documentary that utilises a practice-based research methodology. The resulting project is one that utilises this meld of theory and practice in its exploration of the modern ideals that are reflected in the current technological age.

Chapter Four explores the outcomes of the project, contextualises the creative practice through its theoretical framework, articulates a differentiation between the project and the field and offers a conclusion to the exegesis. It highlights the significance of this project: that my exploration of Slow Media, Modernity, and their influence in the development of filmmaking technology has not been studied in a post-graduate project until now.

On the 18th of October Sabria David, one of the authors of ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’, tweeted that I am ‘doing the first PhD that studies Slow Media’ (David 2012). As such, the project interrogates the evidential lack of contributions in the field by way of doctoral research.

Currently there is only one self-proclaimed Slow Media practitioner working in the area of film. Maia Iotzova is currently producing a film called Green Dream, which explores the relationship between humans and nature, and is looking for funding to complete it (Iotzova 2010). It can therefore be said that, while the topic of Slow Media is beginning to trend, it is still in its infancy.

In recent times, there have been a small number of individuals undergoing Slow Media Diets. For example, in 2010 Jennifer Rauch eschewed the internet, her cell
phone, DVDs and digital music devices, instead opting for newspapers, landline phones, VHS, and snail mail. New York comedian Mark Malkoff spent five days living in his bathroom in an effort to ‘kick his internet addiction’ (Osterhout 2008, n.p.). Although the creative component of this project follows me as I undergo a similar Slow Media Diet, it is primarily concerned with the practice of filmmaking, rather than mere media consumption. It also investigates the core of Slow Media Movement and how it is steeped in a tradition of challenging the effects of Modernity.

Ultimately, the main concern of this exegesis is to examine the experience of media and how the use of different technologies, whether modern or traditional, affect those experiences. It is in the next chapter that I will explore these ever-changing technologies, the modern trend to constantly improve and update them, and how the images produced by them affect us as viewers, creators and subjects.
Chapter Two:
Slow Media and the Quest for the Modern

This chapter will establish the project’s theoretical framework by providing a contextual review of the central literature and creative works relevant to the investigation into a filmmaker’s experience of new and traditional technology. Critical arguments from key theorists such as Walter Benjamin (1931, 1935), Jay David Bolter et al. (2006), Matei Calinescu (1987), Nicholas Carr (2008), Henry Jenkins (2006), Lev Manovich (2005) and James Quandt (2009), concerning methods used by contemporary creative practitioners utilising modern technologies including the internet will also be examined. Specifically, the experience of these technologies will be scrutinised, through the perspectives of the makers and viewers of the created images. As introduced in the previous chapter, it is the contention of theorists such as Jenkins that this experience can be enhanced through the use of technologies that allow for such modern phenomena as Transmedia Storytelling. In contrast there are those such as Benjamin (writing seventy-five years earlier) who contend that the aurotic experience of an image is diminished once it is created through a reproducible technology.

A useful analogy for this debate is a scene from the Paul Thomas Anderson film Boogie Nights (1997), where, after being informed of the inevitable decline of celluloid film within the pornography industry, Jack Horner (played by Burt Reynolds) laments the arrival of VHS technology. He believes that the
accessibility of such equipment will devastate his business; that he will lose his ability to create work of high production value, as had been his talent with celluloid film, and instead be forced to produce films that place fast turnaround ahead of all else. Although fictional, Horner was not the first victim of the arrival of new technology and he is certainly not the last. As this chapter will demonstrate, there is a long history of friction between those who embrace new technologies in the creation of images and those who grieve the purported decay of traditional equipment and the experiences they embody.

Of course, Horner eventually adopted VHS and, now, over thirty years later, the real world has progressed from VHS to DV (Digital Video) tape to the current embodiment of modern, HDD (Hard Disk Drive) film production technology. Along with the utilisation of digital cameras with HDD storage capabilities, Nathan Ensmenger notes the extent to which virtually the entire film industry has been transformed by the digital era:

‘Almost all contemporary filmmaking (the word “film” here is a quaint reference to an earlier technological era) incorporates at least some degree of computer-generated graphics, if only to draw in a background or to erase unwanted elements. In fact, in most studios the production process, from start to finish, has become almost entirely digital and therefore computers are omnipresent and indispensable’

(Ensmenger 2012, p.770).

Indeed, as an independent digital filmmaker working on low budgets, there is rarely an aspect of my own work that does not have an element of digitality about it. This includes internet research during development and online communication with cast and crew, through to digital file management and visual effects in the course of post-production. Then there is distribution, the stage that has arguably been most affected by the maturation of the internet, transforming the experience of images for practitioners and consumers alike.

While the internet began as mainly a one-way source of information (Fuchs 2008, p.125), its rapid development in a digital age of communication and co-operation brought new capabilities, which paved the way for the growth of the online video
industry (Fuchs 2008, p.126). Media experts such as Henry Jenkins and Kelly Chapman highlight this progress, with Chapman proclaiming that there has been more change within this industry in six months than in the previous six years (Chapman 2010). Websites such as Hulu.com, for example, which had previously only been a means of distribution, have now begun producing their own content. We are also witnessing a dramatic increase in the number of Transmedia Storytelling and online video productions that harness the potential of the internet to present stories in innovative ways. Scolari defines Transmedia Storytelling (TS) as:

‘... a particular narrative structure that expands through both different languages (verbal, iconic, etc) and media (cinema, comics, television, video games, etc). TS is not just an adaptation from one media to another. The story that the comics tell is not the same as that told on television or in cinema; the different media and languages participate and contribute to the construction of the Transmedia narrative world’ (Scolari 2009, p.587).

The methods utilised in Transmedia Storytelling see fictional television characters with their own Twitter accounts or Facebook pages, thereby adding to viewers’ engagement while offering further context to a story. Audiences can schedule simultaneous online screenings, so as to share the experience of a film. A viewer’s childhood home can be the unique setting of a brand new interactive music video, reconnecting the viewer ‘temporally to the space and time of the past…’ (Satter in Irwin 2011, p.59). None of these experiences would be possible without the technology that the newer communicative and co-operative incarnations of the internet provide. It is the investment in the modern capabilities of the internet including the social networks of a communicative Web 2.0 and evolved markup languages such as HTML5 that have enabled innovative storytellers to utilise these Transmedia methods (Irwin 2011; Fuchs 2008).

In November 2010, Daniël van Gool wrote that:

‘... three years ago... the discussion about Transmedia was much more of an [sic] conceptual and academic one. Now, it’s here and it’s actually happening: major movie studios, television networks and
gaming studios are all embracing the notion of Transmedia Storytelling’ (van Gool 2010, n.p.).

With traditional filmmakers such as Spike Jonze taking to the web for projects including *I’m Here: A Love Story* (2010), it can be suggested that some practitioners are rapidly embracing the creative possibilities that these young technologies provide. Some have questioned, however, the presence of aura in new media (Bolter et al. 2006, p.21).

It is in response to the exponential creation of such modern media projects, and the claims of convergence fatigue by theorists such as Jenkins and Scholari, that a group of German media experts published ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’ online in January 2010 (David, Blumtritt & Köhler 2010). Although Jenkins and others suggest that new forms of media which utilise modern technology in their storytelling, provide an immersive experience for the viewer (or user), the authors of ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’ believe in more traditional media creation methods. In their fourteen-point list, they propose that media makers around the world strive for the creation of media that is ‘perfect, discursive, dialogic and social’ (David, Blumtritt & Köhler 2010, n.p.).

They also call for this media to provide sustainability to workers in the industry and, perhaps most notably, for media to have a ‘special aura’ about it. This latter objective calls to mind the work of Walter Benjamin, who famously denied the presence of aura in any artwork that had been produced using machines, such as cameras, with which an image could be reproduced (Benjamin 1935). While some theorists, such as Schutt and Berry (2011), imply that aura can be found in the form of personal context, ‘… Benjamin explicitly compares the perceptual competence required when watching a film with that of a pedestrian (or, we might add, a driver) in the midst of traffic in a big modern city’ (Vattimo 1989, p.49). This is an analogy that I, too, utilise within this project’s creative element, at one point comparing my experience of consuming the internet to a ‘truck driver running on uppers’ (Timecode 01:07:50). By invoking a Benjaminian concept of aura, it seems at first glance that David and colleagues are calling for Slow Media projects to shun the purported cursory nature of contemporary media production,
including Transmedia Storytelling, digital video production and, perhaps, even motion picture and photography altogether.

Slow Media, and its resistance to all things ostensibly cursory and devoid of aura, is being widely associated with the ‘Slow Movement’, an idea started with the creation of ‘Slow Food’ in 1986 by Carlo Petrini who lamented the opening of a McDonald’s outlet near the Spanish Steps in Rome. The director of Slow Food International, Renato Sardo says:

‘There was a lot of public debate at the time [1986] about standardization, the McDonaldisation, if you will, of the world. Up until then, any opposition was split in two. On the one hand there were gastronomes, whose focus was fixed entirely on the pleasure of food. The other tradition was a Marxist one, which was about the methods of food production and their social and historical implications. Carlo Petrini, Slow Food’s president, wanted to merge the two debates to provide a way forward’


Thus, by combining the two ideologies, Petrini championed the traditional, family-oriented, social idea that food should be ‘fresh, local, season[al] produce; recipes handed down through the generations; sustainable farming; artisanal production; leisurely dining with family and friends’ (Honoré 2004, p.59). This idea of ‘Slow’ spread to other parts of life, with people like Carl Honoré calling for the notion to be embraced in the areas of medicine, town planning, working life, parenting, sex, and leisure. Honoré says that ‘everything about urban life – the cacophony, the cars, the crowds, the consumerism – invites us to rush rather than relax, reflect or reach out to people’ (Honoré 2004, p.92). Instead, ‘Slowness’ is calm, careful, receptive, still, intuitive, unhurried, patient, reflective, and champions quality over quantity. The Slow Movement rallies against the modern way of thinking that has permeated such areas. It might be argued that David, Blumtritt and Köhler (2010) imply that most contemporary media projects do not possess these characteristics and that any investment in the Modern will suggest that the same investments, which left Jack Horner disenchanted with the pornography business, will leave real-life practitioners disenchanted with the entire media industry.
In 1911, American mechanical engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor asserted that ‘in the past man has been first... in the future the system must be first’ (Carr 2008, n.p.), a modern ideology that led to an overhaul of how factories operated. By delegating small repetitive tasks to each worker, a factory’s efficiency skyrocketed (Carr 2008). The workers complained of the monotony of their work, but Taylor’s modern thinking prevailed and the system came first. Having sacrificed the job satisfaction of the workers in exchange for steady wages and job security (Piore 1982, p.9), the ‘system’ continued along the path towards the modern and has now, a century later, reached a digital age defined by the internet.

Of techno-political modernity, Calinescu writes that it:

‘has by and large continued the outstanding traditions of earlier periods in the history of the modern idea. The doctrine of progress, the confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology... have been associated in various degrees with the battle for the modern...’

(Calinescu 1987, pp.41-42).

A century after Taylor first walked into that factory, this ‘battle for the modern’ saw the investment in the ‘Information Superhighway’ – the internet. Cukier, Ryan and Fornssler note the origin of the phrase, writing:

‘The term “information superhighway” was popularized most famously by Al Gore, and further entrenched within the Clinton Administration’s first-term policy initiatives related to the development of a National Information Infrastructure (NII)... [T]he term came into prominent use in the early 1990s based on the NII plans, when Gore built off of his grandfather’s 1955 use of the term describing the “superhighway” system...’

(Cukier, Ryan & Fornssler 2009, p.618).

While the actual creation of electronics may seem very different to the construction of highway infrastructure, the investment in such ideas is not. Like the bitumen highways before them, the creation of the Electronic Superhighway meant further progress towards a modern way of living. Having progressed through the Web 1.0 and 2.0 stages of growth defined by information and
communication respectively, we now find ourselves on the verge of Web 3.0, a web dominated by co-operation (Fuchs 2008, p.126). With larger bandwidths, there has been an increase in the number of projects that embrace the ideas of Transmedia Storytelling and collaborative content production – projects that seem to lack the attributes desired by ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’.

The world has continued to embrace Taylor’s ideals and now places the system that is the internet above more traditional forms of media. Youtube.com, a site that is barely seven years old, now claims to host one hundred hours of newly uploaded video every minute (YouTube.com 2013). Most of this content, however, is understandably deemed to be at odds with ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’ s call for ‘quality’ media and what Slow Media expert Jennifer Rauch refers to as ‘thoughtful and reflective’ media (Buddenberg 2010, n.p.). Despite this, Youtube.com continues to escalate in growth and popularity, providing us with more and more Rick Astley spin-offs and ‘Keyboard Cat’ re-appropriations. Websites such as YouTube.com have also expanded the field cinema can occupy, thus enabling the burgeoning growth of Transmedia Storytelling.

The Matrix (1999) is seen to contain some significant elements of Transmedia Storytelling, bundling a feature film, comic books, Manga spin-off films, computer games and other merchandise into the one universe and, while many other films before it had released corresponding merchandise, Henry Jenkins highlights The Matrix as a phenomenon. He points to its ‘rabbit hole’ nature, creating a world ‘bigger than the film, bigger than even the franchise’ (Jenkins 2006, p.114). He does concede, however, that some people grow exhausted by this convergent nature and simply give up, opting instead for the more self-contained narrative model of traditional cinema (Jenkins 2006, p.101). Flint Dille suggests that the key to harnessing convergence is in the creation of a franchise, what he defines as:

‘an intellectual property that contains unique characters, settings, problems, story conventions, logos, tag lines and artistic expressions which lend itself to adaptation to other media, mediums, iterations, sequels, prequels and spin-offs’

(Dille 2011, n.p.)
That is to say that the franchise should be at the centre of a convergence model; that it is the key element that perpetuates these Transmedia stories, fueling consumers’ desire for more.

Very few filmmakers or media practitioners have set out to challenge these progressive trends, opting instead to build upon them and employ the capabilities of new technology (especially the internet), creating more innovative and multidimensional methods of storytelling (Ensmenger 2012; Jenkins 2006). UK television drama Misfits (2009) has its characters tweeting live on Twitter during the show’s broadcast. The tweets, written in advance by the show’s lead writer, offer viewers the chance to watch the show with additional context, allowing for a greater experience.

Historically, if a viewer wished for a more immersive experience of a television series, their options for engagement were limited to traditional mediums. Perryman points to the Doctor Who (1963) series, out of which came comics, spin-off books, and novelisations for fans to enjoy. He also, however, points out the contradictory nature of the stories within these supplementary narratives, noting that ‘... the end result is that the majority of fans now feel that these ancillary additions to the franchise enjoy little or no legitimacy in terms of canonicity, or, to put it bluntly, they “don’t count”’ (Perryman 2008, p.23). The example of Doctor Who’s early forays into multiplatform distribution show that when such elements of the story fail to contribute to what ARG experts like Jeff Gomez call ‘a whole that is more satisfying than the sum of its parts’ (van Gool 2010, n.p.), the experience becomes diminished for the consumer. In the case of Doctor Who, the fans later took it upon themselves to further explore the world of the ‘Time Lord’, taking advantage of Virgin Publishing’s open submissions policies and contributing their own work ‘to the official Doctor Who mythos’ (Perryman 2008, p.24). The flood of additional multimedia narratives also included feature films and audio dramas, keeping the story alive even though the television series was off the air for sixteen years. When the show was relaunched in 2005, the abundance of multimedia material within the story’s universe ‘... could explain why Doctor Who was chosen by the BBC to be its flagship for Transmedia Storytelling’ (Perryman 2008, p.25). Alongside the new incarnation
of the program have been online videos, including webisodes, trailers, mini-documentaries, interviews, repeats of the companion show *Doctor Who Confidential*, as well as Adobe Flash-based mini-games (Perryman 2008, p.26). Will Brooker notes:

‘... the experience of following a favourite TV show has already changed for many viewers. The structures are there to enable an immersive, participatory engagement with the programme that crosses multiple media platforms and invites active contribution; not only from fans, who after all have been engaged in participatory culture around their favoured texts for decades, but also as part of the regular, “mainstream” viewing experience’

(Brooker in Perryman 2008, p.26).

The enormous popularity of the new format (evidenced through its continued production, currently in its seventh series), along with the continued evolution of the Time Lord’s narrative by differing user groups, suggests that the *Doctor Who* universe has been enriched by the use of modern digital and participatory technologies.

Such modern methods of storytelling have led to the advent of a new position within the media industry, that of the ‘Experience Designer’ (Peters 2011). Steve Peters compares his role as a modern Transmedia Experience Designer to that of a traditional film director, with both practitioners being involved with the writing of the story, developing scenes, and overseeing production (Peters 2011).

At the 2010 SXSW Conference, Peters appeared alongside Maureen McHugh, presenting *The 10-Minute Transmedia Experience* (a.k.a. *Mime Academy*), a short narrative that led the audience through a sequence of website visits, phone calls, videos, *Google* searches and emails after being presented with a blood-stained rag with a web address printed on it (Trumble 2010). During the session, audience members were invited to use their laptops and phones to help ‘rescue’ a ‘kidnapped mime’. By making the audience active participants in the narrative through such measures, the experience becomes more interactive and layered (Peters 2011). Peters and McHugh have also worked on a number of viral marketing projects, such as 42 Entertainment’s *Why So Serious?* (2007) campaign.
for the release of the film, *The Dark Knight* (2008). That campaign utilised the film’s tagline to build an Alternate Reality Gaming (ARG) site that capitalised on fans’ interest by having them earn content (Andersen 2009). The Transmedia campaign was spread across web pages, interactive games, mobile phones, print, email, real world events, video, and unique collectibles.

By harnessing the capabilities that the internet provides, media practitioners are able to develop a stronger bond with their fans, enriching the experience for creator and viewer alike (Jenkins 2006). Utilising the communicative and co-operative nature of Web 2.0 and 3.0, director Timo Vuorensola and his team enlist a crowdsourcing method they call ‘collaborative content production’ (Joutsen et al. 2008, n.p.).

Vuorensola created his feature films *Star Wreck: In the Pirkinning* (2005) and *Iron Sky* (2012) with the help of an online community made up of thousands of film enthusiasts, including animators who each contributed design elements and ideas for the virtual settings of each film. Vuorensola and his team have since developed the crowd sourcing website *WreckAMovie.com*, which allows users to collaborate on a number of projects ranging from feature and short films to web series and operas. Users can also add their own productions to the website and invite others to contribute to these projects.

Employing a similar concept in 2004, Joseph Gordon-Levitt started *HitRecord.org*. Six years on, the site now claims to:

‘create and develop art and media collaboratively here on our site; we use my position in the traditional entertainment industry to turn that creativity into money-making productions; and then we share any profits with the contributing artists’

(*hitREcord.org* 2010, n.p.).

Users of the website are invited to submit their own content, whether it be a script, an illustration, a storyboard, shot footage, a musical composition, or any other kind of creative piece. Their work is published on the website and other users are welcomed to collaborate on projects. It can therefore be seen that the site utilises the social power of Web 2.0 and 3.0 to create video projects using a ‘collaborative
content production’ framework.

Although the filmic experience continues to transform, modes such as Transmedia Storytelling offer audiences the experience of co-creation while practitioners now have frameworks through which to collaborate with those outside of the industry. The notion of ‘collaborative content production’ would not be possible without the modern technological capabilities of online social networking. Through these online methods, filmmakers can opt to bypass funding bodies, instead securing a budget, an audience, and a crew. For projects like *Star Wreck: In the Pirkinning* (2005), which require a vast amount of time-consuming visual effects work, the filmmakers use crowd sourcing to acquire a large team of eager animators. Where previously, low-budget media practitioners would connect almost exclusively through real world means, they can now establish an entire film crew through social networking sites, simultaneously establishing a fan base. In addition, funding for creative works can now be procured online, eliminating the necessity for many practitioners to seek monetary resources from more traditional funding bodies or other investors.

In 2009, the popular crowd funding website Kickstarter.com launched, with an Australian equivalent Pozible.com (originally called Fundbreak.com.au) launching in 2010. Both websites operate on a similar idea of ‘collaborative content production’, but for purely financial purposes. The line becomes blurred here between the terms ‘creator’ and ‘user’, as the sites feature profiles of people who function in both capacities, displaying projects one has created and projects one has supported. Creatives set financial goals for their projects and ask ‘the crowd’ to contribute money to their campaign, receiving the money only if they reach their goal. Once money is pledged, the contributor can share news of their endowment through their social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, thereby perhaps triggering their online friends to also contribute. Western Australia’s screen funding body, ScreenWest, have now implemented what they call ‘3 to 1’ – a digital crowdfunding initiative wherein the funding body will match threefold the amount a screen project manages to raise online via Pozible.com (ScreenWest 2012). In 2012 ScreenWest filled its funding allocation to ‘3 to 1’ within hours of its launch (Swift 2012). The fact that funding bodies are now beginning to
acknowledge the success of online crowdfunding affords the concept of ‘collaborative content production’ even more legitimacy.

Directors such as Chris Milk, who has directed many notable music videos, commercials, and short films internationally across three decades, now combine the notions of ‘collaborative content production’ with the new capabilities of HTML5 video (a technology synonymous with Web 3.0) to create online music videos. In early 2010, Milk directed The Johnny Cash Project, a crowd sourced music video for Johnny Cash’s Ain’t No Grave in which participants each recreate a frame of the video, using the HTML5 website’s rotoscope-like functions (Yang 2010). The result is an original frame-by-frame animated ‘collaborative content production’. Milk also directed Canadian band The Arcade Fire’s The Wilderness Downtown/We Used To Wait (2010), an ongoing HTML5 multimedia video project, which creates a unique video for each viewer and constructs video of their street from Google Maps and Google Street View. Kathleen Irwin notes that the project ‘... crafts an experience that is personalised and deeply personal as it takes you down memory lane through the streets where you grew up...’ (Irwin 2011, p.57). She writes that:

‘When I first viewed it, it affected me on a very visceral level. I watched it an absurd number of times and forwarded the URL to friends. On both an audio and visual level, I found it mesmerising. I also enjoyed the interface itself – its extremely good use of new media. During long hours in front of the computer, I sometimes drift to Google Earth exploring the streets and addresses where I have spent years that span the relationships that comprise my life’ (Irwin 2011, pp.57-58).

What Irwin is describing here is the connection that she feels to the streets of her past – the same streets that she is able to interact with through Chris Milk’s work. By utilising the HTML5 technology, Milk is able to create a unique set of images for each user. Before this technology, a music video was produced as a single rigid, unchanging piece of work. The ultimate goal was still to connect with viewers, but by allowing viewers to interact with the images – to set the scene on the street of their childhood home; to let them create some of the images and text
themselves – it is building a stronger connection between the work and the viewer. The work now has a greater context of intimacy, belonging and ownership.

Lev Manovich (2005) discusses ‘remixability’, a phenomenon that is somewhat similar to that of ‘collaborative content production’. He writes that:

‘[i]f we compare information of media object with a train, then each receiver can be compared to a train station. Information arrives, gets remixed with other information, and then the new package travels to other [sic] destination where the process is repeated’

(Manovich 2005, n.p.).

This analogy can be applied to all of the aforementioned projects. Vuorensola, HitREcord.org and Milk’s ‘trains’ pass through many stations, attaching many different locomotives to each other. In the case of The Wilderness Downtown, by allowing the viewer to make the setting of the work a place that is important to them, Milk ostensibly allows the audience to drive the train themselves. The train on HitREcord.org’s network, being constantly recreated by its users, has no final destination – it continues along the track with an ever-growing line of locomotives behind it. Manovich contends that remixability shuns ‘...a traditional twentieth century model of cultural communication described [by] movement of information in one direction from a source to a receiver...’ (Manovich 2005, n.p.).

Modern media practitioners, such as Vuorensola and Milk, are also shunning this traditional model. They know that the audience wants to experience more of a connection with the image and that, if more of their own personal context can be inserted into the work through the use of modern technology, this connection will grow stronger (Yang 2010).

One of the ironies of these new models of both storytelling and collaborative content production is their reliance on modern camera technologies in order to achieve the engagement and participation required. Contemporary filmmakers who wish to situate their work within these frameworks rely on high quality images; an assertion that Ensmenger (2012) confirms is integral to the practice. By erasing unwanted elements, filmmakers aim to improve the image for the viewer, thereby strengthening the experience of the media. Practitioners also look to the distribution stage to enhance this viewing experience. Spike Jonze’s short
film *I’m Here* (2010) was first exhibited at the Sundance Film Festival and Berlinale, before it was released online in a very unique way. The web design provides the viewer with an almost cinematic interface in which to watch the film, designing it so the online menu appears situated in a traditional box office and that the viewer is seated inside a theatre before the film commences. It also limits the number of viewers to 12,000 per day, thereby creating a tenor of exclusivity, which encourages the viewer to savour the film with thought and attentiveness in a similar way to ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’s call for sustainable media consumption (David, Blumtritt & Köhler 2010). Furthermore, the viewer is able to schedule a simultaneous online screening with their Facebook friends, thus harnessing the social potential of a communicative Web 2.0.

On a more local level, Sydney-based short filmmaker Martha Goddard’s *Art of Observing* (2009) is a series of short films uploaded online. Each film’s narrative is unrelated to the others in the series, thereby avoiding the trending ‘rabbit hole’ nature of Transmedia Storytelling. Instead, the common theme of these films is centered around the idea that a character can literally step outside their lives for a moment and observe the scene they are in, reflecting on the characters’ own emotions at the time. By having her characters reflect upon their situations, Goddard implores the viewers to be reflective themselves, taking the time to consider what the film is actually attempting to articulate. Furthermore, the *Art of Observing* website attempts a dialogue with the viewer, creating a ‘What’s your story?’ page wherein viewers can, for instance, discuss the themes of the films and their own reactions to them. These examples illustrate where many theorists and practitioners see the future of the media industry (Weil 2002; Jenkins 2006). As larger bandwidths allow for increased utilisation of online video, Transmedia Storytelling projects that encompass some degree of cross-platform production are becoming exponentially prevalent. Rather than simply limiting a story to the one type of media, creators are seeking to expand their narratives across several mediums and rewarding consumers when they participate in all of them. In projects that embrace the ideas of remixability, the narrative will have often changed drastically by the time it even reaches the viewer.

Prior to the internet and television, experiencing a film was usually achieved by
physically travelling to a cinema and sitting in the dark, uninterrupted. Now, audiences have the ability to stay at home and sit at their desks, knowing that their Facebook friends are doing the same somewhere. They spend hours contributing one alternative frame to a music video. They tweet at a fictional character. They are rarely without a digital device. As Jenkins (2006) points out though, there are those who find such demands for attention across platforms exhausting and simply choose not to participate at all; those who have found that an over-reliance on modern technologies to diminishes their experience of the story.

This is the point at which the Slow Media Movement found its place.

It would be foolish to think, though, that the notions embraced by the Slow Media Movement began with Carlo Petrini in 1986. The idea of investment in modern technologies that disrupt known practices has a long history of causing backlash. For instance, in the nineteenth century the Luddites attempted to sabotage machinery to stave off the Industrial Revolution (Jones 2006, p.47) and, although the thinkers behind the Slow Media Movement are not as radical and stand to lose far less than the Luddites, there are similarities in the ideas of resistance between the two movements.

Matei Calinescu writes about the history of such friction:

‘During the last one hundred and fifty years or so, such terms as “modern”, “modernity,” and more recently “modernism,” as well as a number of related notions, have been used in artistic or literary contexts to convey an increasingly sharp sense of historical relativism... What we have to deal with here is a major cultural shift from a time-honored aesthetics of permanence, based on a belief in an unchanging and transcendent ideal of beauty, to an aesthetics of transitoriness and immanence, whose central values are change and novelty’

(Calinescu 1987, p.1).

Just as Manovich pointed out the difference between the twentieth and twenty-first century models of media in their transitoriness (Manovich 2005), so too does Calinescu point out such differences in ‘aesthetics of permanence’ and modern
aesthetics (Calinescu 1987, p.1). This friction, then, has been present for much longer than Slow Media has. In his article for *The Atlantic*, Nicholas Carr cites Plato’s *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates laments the development of writing and its overshadowing of human thought. Of Socrates, Carr writes:

‘He feared that, as people came to rely on the written word as a substitute for the knowledge they used to carry inside their heads, they would, in the words of one of the dialogue’s characters, “cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful.” And because they would be able to “receive a quantity of information without proper instruction,” they would “be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant.” They would be “filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom”’

(Carr 2008, n.p.).

Some may find it difficult to grasp the concept of the hand-written word being transitory, yet the resistance to modern methods can be seen in Socrates’ incredulity. This example demonstrates the long history of friction between the modern and the traditional, as well as motivating one of the satirical elements within *Detour Off the Superhighway*, with Socrates (played by myself) bemoaning the written word’s effect on the human mind. In the context of my experiment

![Figure 1: Still from Detour Off the Superhighway (2013), © Patrick Kelly.](image-url)
within the film, the sketch offers an historical context to the skepticism of the modern. Such skepticism arose again later, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during the ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’. While ‘the general feeling was that the moderns were still dwarfs in comparison with the ancient giants’, the Moderni blamed the Ancients ‘for the prevailing sterility of thought and the general lack of adequate methods in the sciences’ (Calinescu 1987, p.23).

With greater investment in the prevailing Moderni’s thinking, the western world experienced mechanisation, triggering the Industrial Revolution and further investment in new technologies. Karl Marx bemoaned this development, just as ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’ bemoans the lack of sustainability that technology brings in the media industries today. Marx exclaimed that ‘capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the laborer’ (Marx [1867] 1976, p.556). The world was, indeed, gearing towards Frederick Winslow Taylor’s vision of ‘the system’ being put first.

It was during this significant phase in history, which saw the aforementioned investment in mechanisation that photography developed. In a somewhat similar manner to Socrates, the Ancients, and Marx, Walter Benjamin pointed out the differences between art that could and could not be reproduced. He notably did so through the use of the term ‘aura’. The notion of ‘aura’ is an important one, yet is notoriously difficult to define. Benjamin wrote:

‘What is aura? A peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be. To follow, while reclining on a summer’s noon, the outline of a mountain range on the horizon or a branch, which casts its shadow on the observer until the moment or the hour partakes of their presence - this is to breathe in the aura of these mountains, of this branch. Today, people have as passionate an inclination to bring things close to themselves or even more to the masses, as to overcome uniqueness in every situation by reproducing it’

(Benjamin 1931, p.20).

Benjamin’s definition arguably raises the question of its own viability, and it is
this contestation that I explore through the film *Detour Off the Superhighway*. Benjamin himself had explanations of events and instances that could and could not bear an aura, ideas that can be shown to directly contradict each other in his various works. In ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, he wrote:

‘One might subsume the eliminated element in the term “aura” and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalise by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of the tradition’

(Benjamin 1935, p.3).

Yet, in ‘A Short History of Photography’, he claims that some earlier photographs produced with ‘primitive’ cameras had an aura to them, but that this aura dissipated upon the introduction of ‘instruments capable of overcoming darkness completely and of registering objects with the clarity of a mirror’ (Benjamin 1931, p.19) – instruments widely used in art in the 1930s. What Benjamin claims is that, the ability to adjust the aesthetics of an image – through such in-camera features as focus, aperture, exposure – renders it unauratic. It could be posited that if Benjamin were writing today, such features might include retro filters within mobile applications like *Instagram* – or the ability to edit an image in Adobe Photoshop.

Schutt and Berry, in their discussion of the aura of personal context within photography, highlight the power of juxtaposition and the impact it has on the beholder of an image; an impact ‘purportedly embedded in the photo itself, something that we feel but can’t put our finger on – the “different intensity”’ (Schutt & Berry 2011, p.39). They link this ‘different intensity’ to concepts of postmemory and aura, asserting that ‘... there are the additional contexts generated though visual juxtapositioning; placing two or more media items together in a visual manner’ (Schutt & Berry 2011, p.40). Weil recalls the history of juxtaposition ‘beginning with collage in the early 20th Century...’ and notes that ‘... as the flow intensifies, artists of all backgrounds have engaged with the notion
of reprocessing cultural fragments, thus creating a new context for the comprehension of information...’ (Weil 2002, p.524). This notion of context is explored in the film *Detour Off the Superhighway* through composing careful sequences of images. Schutt and Berry (2011) write that:

‘when someone reads or views a narrative sequence, the meanings they get from, or give to, an item such as a photograph will depend on what came before it and/or after it in the sequence. In other words, new possibilities... are generated from the contexts and frames created by the narrative journey to that item...’

(Schutt & Berry 2011, p.39).

Nevertheless, whilst it can be said that personal context can have influence on the aura of an image, ‘aura’ remains a malleable term. Such malleability has allowed a number of theorists to utilise the term ‘aura’ in a number of settings, such as cinephilia.

In his article ‘Everyone I Know is Stayin’ Home: The New Cinephila’ (2009), James Quandt adds to Sontag’s ‘lament for the bygone days of cinephilia...’ (Betz 2010, p.130). He writes:

‘The phrase “in cinema experience” has recently entered the discourse of film curation – to differentiate traditional filmgoing from gallery and installation presentation of “moving image” works, videotheques, etc – a marker of the rapid move of cinema’s realm from the social and ceremonial to the insular and domestic, the analogue to the digital, the hard-won to the easily accessible’

(Quandt 2009, n.p.).

Cinephilia’s main concern is with the rise of modern technology and its command of the traditional experience of watching a film, projected from celluloid, in a cinema. He uses the example of how the colour grade in a 35mm reel of Jacques Demy’s *Model Shop* (1969) was much more vibrant than a DVD version of the same film (Quandt 2009). He claims that the DVD is an inferior copy that lacks the aura of the celluloid version, saying that:
‘[o]ne enters the realm of the ineffable, of those venerable Benjaminian notions of aura and authenticity, when attempting to analyze the difference between analogue and digital copies - the weight, solidity, grain, clarity, the there-ness of images are all difficult qualities to describe’

(Quandt 2009, n.p.).

He claims that motion picture, edited, manipulated and printed on celluloid, is an auratic form of art. Furthermore, Quandt goes on to quote film director Tsai Ming-liang, who says he is:

‘... not happy about the whole DVD medium, in fact. The quality of film experience is crashing. People are now satisfied just watching a film to find out what the story is. The experience is almost being reduced to a kind of information gathering. What is going on? Who is it? My films are really for the big screen only’

(Ming-liang in Quandt 2009, n.p.).

Ming-liang’s dismissal of this modern distribution model is interesting to note, given that Benjamin, in turn, dismissed the entire medium that Ming-liang works in, comparing ‘... the perceptual competence required when watching a film with that of a pedestrian (or, we might add, driver) in the midst of traffic in a big modern city’ (Vattimo 1989, p.49). While Ming-liang laments DVDs, David Lynch has used much harsher language when addressing the issue of viewing films on a mobile phone. He purports that the idea that someone might believe they have properly experienced a film when viewed on a mobile phone (via an iTunes download, for instance) is preposterous (Sciretta 2008), however he seems to have little argument against DVDs, merely insisting that the DVD versions of his films do not contain chapter marks, making the act of skipping through a movie much more difficult and, thus, encouraging the viewer to watch the film in a single sitting. Such moves encourage audiences to properly experience Lynch’s notion of aura, a different notion to that of Ming-liang.

More recently, Steven Soderbergh pointed to the decline of cinema in Hollywood, defining the medium as:

‘... a specificity of vision. It’s an approach in which everything
matters. It’s the polar opposite of generic or arbitrary and the result is as unique as a signature or a fingerprint. It isn’t made by a committee, and it isn’t made by a company, and it isn’t made by the audience. It means that if this filmmaker didn’t do it, it either wouldn’t exist at all, or it wouldn’t exist in anything like this form’ (Soderbergh in Brody 2013, n.p.).

The element that makes cinema so special, according to Soderbergh, seems similar to Schutt and Berry’s (2011) idea of an aura of personal context. It is important to note the differences in Lynch and Ming-liang’s description of what constitutes an experience. If aura is about the experience – as Benjamin would put it, ‘a peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be’ (Benjamin 1931, p.20) – then what has changed between Benjamin’s, Ming-liang’s, and Lynch’s respective times?

Could it be that aura is a relative and, more importantly, reflective quality in art? If art is only auratic when contained in a traditional form, then it follows that it would be impossible for art or media to have an aura while employing a more modern form or technology, at least until that technology became less prevalent. This notion triggered the search for an auratic experience (or lack of) in several media technologies within the creative element of this project.

Schutt and Berry (2011) discuss the presence of aura within family photography, quoting Briggs, who wrote that ‘the aura is neither a stable attribute nor an object, but an index of the dynamic fraught relationship between the beholder and the artefact’ (Briggs in Schutt & Berry 2011, p.48). This is an important point, reaffirming Benjamin’s contested definition of the term, while also explaining that aura occurs within the connection between the consumer and the object. Schutt and Berry position their own ancestral photographs within the article, noting in two pictures that ‘the aura in these two images speaks of optimism and trust in a good future’ (Schutt & Berry 2011, p.49), thereby indicating that photography can, in fact, exude an aura. What must occur for an aura to be present, they claim, is a personal context, of which the viewer is aware and which ‘... draws our attention to something purportedly embedded in the photo itself, something that we feel but can’t put our finger on – the “different intensity”’ (Schutt & Berry
‘The Slow Media Manifesto’ calls for media that ‘emanate a special aura. They generate a feeling that the particular medium belongs to just that moment of the user’s life’ (David, Blumtritt & Köhler 2010, n.p.), a notion that is also inherent in the Slow Food Movement. A significant example of an auratic Slow Food item is lardo di Colonnata, a cured pork product traditionally made in Italy and famous for its white marble. Petrini compared lardo to ‘other objects of significant national heritage, including major works of art or buildings of national architectural note’ (Leitch in Halpern 2010, p.40). Similarly, members of the Slow Media Movement want producers to strive to create auratic work and for consumers to ingest such work. Just as Benjamin unveiled a lack of aura in the art of the 1930s, ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’ discusses the same lack of aura in media today. The Slow Media Movement, then, seems deeply grounded in traditional skepticism of the modern. There have been a number of theorists and practitioners who have embraced the idea of technological reflection.

In addition to aura, another important principle in ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’ states that ‘Slow Media advance Prosumers’ (David, Blumtritt & Köhler 2010, n.p.), encouraging people to consume media in a thoughtful and reflective manner. Some have gone through the experience of technological reflection under the banner of the Slow Media Movement, while others under the less official guise of simply ‘switching off’. Either way, these projects have seen the participants going offline in this digital age that places such importance on the internet. New York academic Jennifer Rauch underwent what she calls a ‘Slow Media Diet’, in which she forewent the use of the internet, mobile phones, DVDs, MP3 players, cable television, and other digital forms of media consumption, instead opting for VHS tapes, audio cassettes, landline telephones, newspapers, zines, and analogue television (Rauch 2009).

In 2010 New York comedian Mark Malkoff spent five days living in his bathroom, in an effort to overcome his ‘addiction’ to the internet. Although his project was not embarked upon under the Slow Media banner, it was an act of resistance to modern technology. Pointing to how much time he ‘wastes’ online, he decided instead to devote his time in the bathroom to learning a new set of
skills. Rather than dedicating his time to social networking and blog-surfing, Malkoff memorised the names of all the United States presidents in order and learnt to play *Every Rose Has Its Thorn* on guitar (Osterhout 2010). Rauch and Malkoff’s experiments epitomise the growing number of people resisting society’s heavy investment in modern media – media and technologies that value quantity and fast turnaround over the ideals outlined in ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’. While the Slow Media Movement’s principles of consumption have been validated through such experiments as Rauch’s ‘Slow Media Diet’ and its theories validated through such references as Benjamin’s notions surrounding aura in art, the challenge the movement seems to face is that there are very few media practitioners who claim to be a part of the movement at the production level.

At the time of writing, it seems that Maia Iotzova, a Canadian-based Bulgarian filmmaker, is the only self-proclaimed Slow Media producer (Iotzova 2010). She laments the nature of media production today, explaining that:

‘I wanted to create media like the food I enjoyed to eat, nutritious, fresh, local, prepared with love and care and shared with my friends and family. At the time I was thinking of creating a media company called Slow Food Media, as I delved deeper into this more organic media production I changed my mind about the name’

(Iotzova 2010, n.p.).

Iotzova laments the current state of media production, placing deadlines ahead of perfection. When emailed, Iotzova said that while she is glad that there is a manifesto, she is personally not following it for fear of her work becoming formulaic rather than intuitive (M Iotzova 2012, pers. comm., 5 March). Rather, Iotzova uses digital video in her work, which might seem at odds with the ideals behind Slow Media, given the ambiguity surrounding Benjamin’s slippery definition. She says she feels:

‘... that cameras and the internet are part of our daily reality. We have to use what is the language and modes of communication at the time. I believe in using all the tools that are out there, but smartly. Never for the sake of being cool. It is about being conscious’

(M Iotzova 2012, pers. comm., 5 March).
It seems that Iotzova’s practice cannot be defined succinctly as ‘Slow Media’. By comparing media to food and shunning any incrementally better defined philosophy, Iotzova’s practice can instead be defined by her own almost Benjaminian, auratic experience of it. To invoke Schutt and Berry (2011), perhaps it is the personal context of Iotzova’s filmic experience that makes her work auratic.

Through this chapter’s investigation of the works of Benjamin, Bolter et al., Quandt, Schutt and Berry, and Weil, it can now be said that aura pertains to one’s own reflective experience of, and the personal context surrounding, a work; what Benjamin loosely characterised as ‘... a peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be...’ (Benjamin 1931, p.20). Just as Benjamin pointed to the lack of aura in photography in the 1930s, so too did James Quandt with DVDs almost eighty years later. Iotzova’s current lamentation of indiscernible aura in modern media production is manifested in her Slow Media practice. It can be gleaned that such resistance most often arises out of a purported lack of aura in modern media of the time. Thinkers such as Benjamin and Quandt and practitioners such as Iotzova reinforce this notion. Few theorists concerned with aura concede that modern works of their time do provoke an aura. Bolter et al. point to The Oakland Project (2004), an ongoing audio project based in a cemetery, which offers ‘an experience in which visitors walk among the graves and hear the stories of the ghosts’ (Bolter et al. 2006, p.23), noting that ‘we are seeking to exploit the unique character, the aura, of the cemetery’ (Bolter et al. 2006, p.23).

Regarding aura in new media, Bolter et al. write that:

‘... Benjamin was wrong if he thought audiences and producers would accept a final and irrevocable loss of aura in their popular media forms. What Benjamin identified was not the end of aura, but rather an ongoing crisis, in which the experience of aura is alternatively called into question and reaffirmed’

(Bolter et al. 2006, p.22).

This explains, then, both Quandt’s claim that cinema is auratic and Benjamin’s own contrasting views in his various publications; that at varying times media can
indeed have an aura about it, but only with ample reflection on said aura. Perhaps the Slow Food Movement’s description of the aura of lardo di Colonnata should be taken into consideration. Emily Halpern asserts that:

‘because globalized marketing of these products has made them widely available, they inform the consumer about the existence of an “even more authentic item” and serve to increase the item’s aura in its place of origin’

(Halpern 2010, pp.42-43).

Perhaps a DVD or a streaming video on a mobile device can play a similar role for the films of Tsai Ming-liang or David Lynch. Perhaps, in years to come, Chris Milk will reflect that his HTML5 experiences are not meant for exhibition on computerised eyeware or other technologies of the future. The creation of Transmedia Storytelling, collaborative content production, online video, and other innovative film and media projects will increase, progress, and continue to innovate. Despite the obvious possibility that there is aura to be found in modern media, if more Slow Media producers do emerge, they will likely lament the purported lack of it. It will be interesting to note the longevity of the Slow Media Movement and whether its advocates’ notions of what is deemed auratic, in fact, change.

The Slow Media Movement’s concerns have been manifested before, going back prior to the ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’ to the times of Socrates. It can also be noted that the Movement’s call for work to be auratic does not necessarily discount the work to also be considered new media. It is clear that there will always be some incarnation of a Slow Media Movement. From Socrates’ lamentation of the effects of the written word, to Henry Jenkins’ observation of users giving up on The Matrix, people will always resist the utilisation of modern technology. The ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’ continues today, with the Slow Media Movement on one side and the creators of modern projects on the other.

This chapter has examined the theories and practices surrounding this ‘Quarelle’, developing the basis for the creative element of this project, in which I set out to explore and highlight this ongoing crisis and to test the contention that modern
media is not as auratic as traditional media. The film highlights the need for many filmmakers to utilise the most contemporary cameras available to them – a practice I, too, have engaged in – while also seeking to discover whether some of the images produced with traditional devices may exude a ‘different intensity’. It is through the autoethnographic and qualitative approach to the experiment, which informs the documentary, that the project is able to present these findings in an effective way. As such, the findings in this chapter form a meld with the project’s creative practice element.

This project examines the experience of media; the aura an image exudes and whether that ‘different intensity’ can come from modern technologies or whether it is stronger within more traditional forms. The visual thesis will attest to the notion that while reflection is a cornerstone to an auratic work, aura can be found within newer technologies as well as older ones and that, while many have lamented the purported lack of aura in modern technology, this is an ongoing debate. Through a connective examination, this exegesis and film prove that aura is present in any image that can generate “explosions” of response (Schutt & Berry 2011, p.40) through a personal context between the image and its beholder.

As the following chapter will prove, this exegesis and the film Detour Off the Superhighway together show that this debate is an ongoing one; that Slow and new media can be as auratic as each other; and that it does not matter if an image is created using a modern camera or a traditional camera. What matters is that the image inspires engagement on a personal level.
Chapter Three:
The Experience of the Detour

This chapter will deliver contemplative understandings of the process of creating the feature-length documentary *Detour Off the Superhighway*. Just as the previous chapter offered insight into the auralic experience of modern and traditional media technologies, through the work of other theorists and practitioners in the field, including Benjamin (1931, 1935), Bolter et al. (2006), Calinescu (1987), Iotzova (2011), Jenkins (2006), Jonze (2010), Manovich (2005), Milk (2010), Quandt (2009), and Schutt and Berry (2011), this chapter will examine the production process of the visual thesis and demonstrate a reflective exploration into the progressive workings and findings of this project’s creative practice, through my own challenging of historical filmmaking trends.

*Detour Off the Superhighway* set out to explore the experience of various modern and traditional media technologies and whether there was an aura to any of these experiences. In my textual analysis, I discovered the ongoing, questionable nature of aura; that thinkers, such as Benjamin, believe an artwork is devoid of aura the moment it can be mechanically reproduced, while others believe that aura can, in fact, be found in newer forms of media. This chapter will have a strong focus on my own experiences of the media technologies I use within the film and the question of whether there is aura within those experiences. In this chapter I compare those experiences to the positions stated by Benjamin, Bolter et al. and
the authors of ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’, as well as the experiences of new media works, including those of Jonze and Milk, and of Iotzova’s Slow Media work.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the resistance to modern media technologies throughout history seems largely due to a purported diminishing of the experiences they evoke. From the days of Socrates lamenting the written word’s detrimental impact on the human mind, through to the Slow Media Movement’s Benjaminian contention that modern media frameworks fail to invoke a sense of aura, such opposition to the modern has a long history. At the beginning of Chapter Two, I described the scene in Boogie Nights (1997) in which Jack Horner wishes to continue producing his films (and the resulting aauratic experiences) using the same equipment he has utilised for years. In my own experience of technology prior to this project, I have rarely bemoaned the rapid changes in filmmaking. The only lamentation I have experienced to this point has been the scarcity of funding for my own investment in much contemporary equipment. Whenever I have had the opportunity, however, I have used the newest filmmaking tools I could muster. This mentality has also spread to other aspects of my life, notably as a consumer of the internet and its social networks; an area I explored at the beginning of Detour Off the Superhighway by showing my constant use of mobile devices, while simultaneously performing other tasks, such as cooking, driving, and spending time with friends. This introduction to the film highlights the disruptive consequences of a devotion to modern technology in my own life.

The film goes on to examine the implications of resisting the use of modern devices as both a filmmaker and a consumer. The title itself employs wordplay in the context of Bill Clinton and Al Gore’s investment in the infrastructure of the internet: what they termed the ‘Information Superhighway’ (Cukier, Ryan & Fornssler 2009, p.618). My film examines what happens when I, as a filmmaker and consumer, adopt a new approach to media and communication technology, utilising older technologies rather than more contemporary ones. It studies how these technologies developed, how their functionality influences the user, and the ramifications of ‘looking back’ at these filmmaking technologies and their
predecessors. It also becomes a rather personal film containing a reflection on my family’s experiences of media and communication technologies, including memories from my own childhood and an examination of my Nanna’s album of photographs from the 1930s. By comparing these images with my own photographs using more modern technologies, I reflect on the similarities and differences between these eras of media use and the auratic experiences that the images elicit.

When I initiated this project, I had originally intended to investigate the development and increasing prevalence of web series and online distribution of video. Having read of the impact that emerging programming models have had on the production of online video (Richmond 2008), I initially set out to explore how the creative process differs for a filmmaker who creates exclusively online content. I had always ultimately released my own work online through YouTube.com, Vimeo.com and my own website and, as a young filmmaker with a passion for the new, this seemed like a logical area of study in which to engage. Upon beginning this line of inquiry, I found the works of Spike Jonze and Chris Milk, and their adoption of the most contemporary storytelling styles and technologies, to be most riveting. Examining why creative practitioners like myself choose to utilise contemporary technologies I discovered that, along with an abundance of enthusiasm for such practices, there was also a resistance to these
ideas, most recently in the form of the Slow Media Movement. Slow Media advocates called for media to be ‘thoughtful and reflective’ (Buddenberg 2010). Along with such cinephiles as James Quandt (2009), Roger Ebert (2008) has written about his ‘conservatism’ regarding the experience of viewing movies. He writes:

‘For some time past I’ve realized I am profoundly conservative. No, not in my politics. In my thinking about the movies, and particularly about how best to experience them. This may be a character flaw, but I cherish it, and believe it helps my criticism. I adhere to the notion that the best way to see a movie is by light projected through celluloid onto a large screen in front of a sizable audience that gives it their full attention. The key words here are projected, celluloid, large screen and attention’

(Ebert 2008, n.p.).

Although Ebert also supports the case for the home viewing of BluRay copies of films on a High Definition screen, he asserts that it is preferable to watch celluloid films in a cinema. In the previous chapter, I cited filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang’s contempt for DVD viewing of his films. My position on film projection from a filmmaker’s perspective, on the other hand, is far more liberal. Having had a limited number of experiences watching my own films projected onto a large screen in front of a sizeable audience, let alone a budget to obtain a final celluloid print for exhibition, I have been happy enough for an audience to view my short films on Youtube.com. Likewise, while I had shot, cut and spliced other filmmakers’ projects using 16mm celluloid before, and was aware of creative practitioners such as Woody Allen and Sofia Coppola being described as ‘purists’ for exclusively shooting their films on celluloid (Mandell 2012, n.p.), I was also excited about the seemingly exponential abundance of increasingly high resolution digital cameras on the market. Along with the improvement in image resolution, decreases in both the size of equipment and the cost of camera operation have improved accessibility (Kattelle 1986, p.47), making it more feasible for filmmakers without the budgets of Allen or Coppola to produce films using digital technology. I had never seriously questioned whether or not the industry would eventually become exclusively digital.
As a consumer, I had an appreciation for celluloid, but continued to embrace the increasing digitality of cinema. I had seen François Truffaut’s *Jules et Jim* (1962) projected in 35mm celluloid in 2009 at the Brisbane International Film Festival and, although I found it to be a much more magical experience than when I had originally seen it on DVD years before, I was still content to watch that DVD or, indeed, Richard Linklater’s feature film *Slacker* (1991) streaming on *YouTube.com*. Enjoying the widespread options and convenience made available by the internet, I had never felt an overwhelming urge to go offline for any deliberate amount of time.

My research, however, had unveiled a number of, in Jennifer Rauch’s words, ‘Slow Media Diets’, whereby people were giving up the internet for a period of time. As discussed in Chapter Two, New York comedian Mark Malkoff undertook a similar project. It seemed that, along with an increasing adoption of modern technology in media projects, there was also a growing trend to forego such technology. I considered that perhaps it would be interesting to explore this mentality through the narrative of the creative element of this research project, while also implementing some of the more reflective aspects of contemporary media works.

With this in mind, I wrote a screenplay breakdown for twelve ‘webisodes’ of *The Online Experience with Mike Plugg*, a science fiction comedy in the style of Edgar Wright’s *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* (2010) about a computer company janitor who strives to make a computer for one’s eye but eventually discovers the disastrous ramifications of investing too heavily in technology, under dangerous circumstances. Mike was to realise the benefits of embracing Slowness. The series would adhere to the social and discursive ideas exhibited in Spike Jonze’s *I’m Here: A Love Story* (2010) and Martha Goddard’s *Art of Observing* (2009), inviting the audience to share the viewing experience and attempting a dialogue with them through social networking sites, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. I felt this, in addition to the themes within the narrative, would sufficiently examine the effects of employing the notions of ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’ during the production and distribution of online media.
As I read more about Slow Media and how it might inform my creative practice, however, I discovered what seemed to be the problematic nature of aura within media. Specifically, I came across Walter Benjamin’s famous assertion, which read ‘... that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art... [T]he technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of the tradition’ (Benjamin 1935, p.3).

This, I found puzzling. How could any medium with the ability to be reproduced be devoid of aura? If Benjamin’s theory was correct, then web series, online video, digital cinema, motion picture celluloid, and stills photography could never be auratic. I did not want to believe it. Not even traditional filmmakers, including such aforementioned ‘purists’ as Woody Allen and Sofia Coppola (Mandell 2012, n.p.), whose films I find exude aura, could generate auratic work, evidently. It seemed that the presence of aura within a work was dependent on creating art with the use of technologies pre-dating photography; that the artist would need at least a brush and canvas to convey the feeling of ‘a peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be’ (Benjamin 1931, p.20). With the manifesto’s stipulation that Slow Media be auratic, the discovery of Benjamin’s work ostensibly seemed to render the prospect of creating a web series that explores Slowness problematic. If his theory was correct, then not only would my proposed web series be devoid of aura, so too would every piece of modern media that utilised contemporary technology in its production. While a web series might adhere to ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’s message that media be sustainable, quality, dialogic, social, respectful and progressive, if it was fundamentally destitute of aura, it could not be considered a Slow Media production. Indeed, if I were to produce a work that embraced the ideas behind Slow Media, utilising Walter Benjamin’s definition of aura, I would have to use more traditional technologies of production and distribution. It seemed that the project would not be as effective in the form of a series of online videos. Additionally, the link between the project’s theory and practice felt increasingly disconnected. With elements of online creative content, theories of Slow Media and aura and very little focus on the technologies themselves, the project was scattered, lacking the inextricable meld that a practice-led research methodology required. There needed to be a change in direction for the project.
Instead of attempting what seemed already to be a failed model of a Slow web series, I wanted to further examine the principles behind the Slow Media Movement. What was the motivation behind the movement? Why did Benjamin assert that motion picture and photography could not be auratic? Was this the extent of such resistance to modern technology? Ultimately, it was this friction between the modern and the traditional – between thinkers such as Ebert, Quandt and the advocates of the Slow Media Movement, and those investing in more modern forms of media such as Jonze and Milk – that I found most engaging. Instead of merely investigating the creation of new forms of media, why not examine this ideological division within the media world between the use of modern and traditional technologies?

Further research led me down an interesting path. Upon reading Bolter et al.’s argument that ‘... what Benjamin identified was not the end of aura, but rather an ongoing crisis, in which the experience of aura is alternatively called into question and reaffirmed’ (Bolter et al. 2006, p.22), Benjamin’s notion seemed debatable. Perhaps aura was in the eye of the beholder. As explored in the previous chapter, the fundamentals surrounding the concept of aura are contested. Schutt and Berry highlight the fact that it is ‘... something that we feel but can’t put our finger on – the “different intensity”’ (Schutt & Berry 2011, p.39). Rather than avoid confronting this discrepancy, I decided to deconstruct the concept of aura further through a new model for the creative practice element of the project. In doing so, I wished to uncover the difference between the experiences of modern technologies and those of more traditional technologies. Were images created with a digital camera less auratic than those created with an analogue camera? Were both completely devoid of it? Would a camera with no zoom or focus functionality that also required longer exposure time produce an image with this ‘different intensity’? I would explore these questions through an experiment similar to Rauch’s ‘Slow Media Diet’.

Where I had previously attempted to implement the principles espoused by ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’ in the production of a web series, I would investigate the experience of technology and seek to test Benjamin’s idea that aura could not be produced with contemporary technology. I would do so through the use of several
pieces of filmmaking equipment from different eras throughout the history of the craft, stepping backwards one era at a time, thereby performing a reflective comparison of the experience of each technology.

I went on to research various recent ‘looking back’ experiments, in which participants went ‘offline’ for a period of time, including those of Rauch (2010) and Malkoff (2010) outlined in the previous chapter. New York academic Jennifer Rauch (2010) had implemented a hiatus from contemporary communication technology for approximately six months in 2010. Choosing 1990 as her technological benchmark, she forewent the use of the internet and mobile phones in favour of payphones, typewriters, postcards, zines, VHS tapes, and audiocassettes. Similarly, New York Comedian Mark Malkoff (2010) attempted to overcome what he referred to as his ‘addiction’ to the internet by living in his bathroom for five days. Instead, he attempted to memorise the United States presidents’ names in order and learn to play Every Rose Has its Thorn on the guitar.

While these experiments had a strong focus on ‘digital disenchantment’ and saw their participants feeling initially overcome by their use of the internet, my own situation was different. I had been perfectly content with my consumption of the internet up to this point and, rather than merely examining my digital life as a consumer, this project would also apply these ideas of ‘looking back’ to my life as a creative practitioner. Performing this experiment using a practice-led research methodology would also strengthen the aspect of reflexivity within the project, an integral aspect of a connective model approach to practice-led research. For instance, while Malkoff’s experiment came across as more of a stunt by a comedian (Osterhout 2010), Rauch seemed genuinely interested in the implications the experiment would have on her digital life. She writes:

‘My main priority is to escape the gift/curse of constant communication and infinite information, in order to 1) free up time to spend on other things, such as analog[ue] or material forms of media, and 2) enable some contemplation about the role of digital media in my life. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, no one knows who discovered water, but it probably wasn’t a fish’

(Rauch 2010, n.p.)
Hoping to learn something about one’s habits while offline (or ‘out of water’, as Rauch invokes) seems to be a central trait of the ‘Slow Media Diet’. This trait is also present in my own experiment. By utilising older camera technologies, I hoped to reflect on the process of using each technology as I progressed through the chosen technological eras. In combining this process with contextual analysis, I would be able to differentiate the auratic experiences of the images produced by each camera, thereby strengthening the meld of theory and practice that was lacking in the previous creative practice model.

The process of determining which technologies to use was extensive. I eventually decided to focus on cameras – both motion picture and stills – as well as technologies and forms used immediately prior to the advent of photography in the 1820s. This is due to Benjamin’s contention that the replicative nature of photography equates to a scarcity of aura within the images it produces. In ‘A Short History of Photography’, Benjamin speculated that some earlier cameras may have been able to produce an aura in the days before ‘instruments capable of overcoming darkness completely and of registering objects with the clarity of a mirror’ (Benjamin 1931, p.19). As this is Benjamin’s most generous description of which contemporary (of the 1930s) technologies can produce aura, and as this description prohibits the use of editing in the production of an auratic work, I decided to direct the majority of the project’s attention to the aura produced by cameras, ranging from those earlier technologies of which Benjamin writes through to the cameras of the modern day. I also decided that these cameras would, for the most part, be consumer level equipment, partly for financial reasons but also because of the nature of my own past creative practice, which had itself invested heavily in the use of contemporary consumer level technology of the time. In determining which technologies to utilise for the experiment, having noted the ‘looking back’ method of inquiry used by such experiments as Rauch’s, I chose the following technological signposts to examine:

- Sony DCR-TRV16E MiniDV Camera (manufactured in 2004)
- JVC GX-88E Colour Video (VHS) Camera (manufactured in 1976)
- Ricoh Super 8 400Z (manufactured in 1967)
- Six20 Brownie D Kodak (Stills Camera) (manufactured in 1946)
- Folding Pocket Kodak (Stills Camera) (manufactured in 1898)
- Cyanotype Printing Process (discovered in 1842)
- Pinhole Camera (invented in 1826)
- Diorama (originated in 1822)

The cameras listed above were chosen for their significance to the history of the practice of filmmaking and photography. The importance of Digital Video has been discussed previously, with portability and efficiency key factors in the medium’s success. These factors have become even more prolific since the emergence of digital cameras that record images to memory cards or hard disk drives. Ensmenger notes the impact that the digital revolution has had on the production of film and video, writing that ‘[i]n fact, in most studios the production process, from start to finish, has become almost entirely digital...’ (Ensmenger 2012, p.770). Coupled with the D-SLR (Digital Single-Lens Reflex) camera used for documenting much of this experiment, the consumer-grade Sony DCR-TRV16E was an important camera to begin with, as it represented the earlier days of digital filmmaking.

I found using this camera to be a largely nostalgic experience, serving as a reminder of my own early experiences in filmmaking. Due to the fact that my own filmmaking career began during the prevalence of Digital Video, with my first short film Spare (2007) shot on a Sony PD150 DV Camera, it seemed natural to begin this experiment with an examination of Digital Video. Having become acclimatised to higher resolution video, the aesthetic produced by this camera seemed dull to me and the experimentation with in-built effects, such as ‘night vision’, reinforced my preference for my more contemporary workflow of capturing natural-looking images and manipulating them in post-production. The use of Digital Video tape and the requirement that it be digitised in ‘real time’ prior to the editing process also differed from the ‘drag and drop’ characteristic of the D-SLR cameras I had recently adopted. These production and post-production processes mirrored workflows from early in my filmmaking career, thereby
providing additional personal context to the situation and, thus, heightening the auratic experience of using this camera.

The JVC VHS Camera was selected for its notability as an early example of a VHS camera, a medium which ‘... gave way to a whole range of experimentation with the moving image in the arts’ (Weil 2002, p.523), allowing its users to record, review and exhibit their work within a narrow window of time, uninhibited by once-enormous processing times. Nash points to the convenient workflows inherent in VHS technology, pointing to the famous same-day exhibition of video artist Nam June Paik’s footage of Pope Pius VI’s motorcade in New York in 1965. He writes:

‘Video... embodied a principle of instant feedback – recorded images could be immediately played back through a monitor or suitable adapted television set. Instant feedback facilitated work that played with this property of the medium, though it was regarded by some, such as influential art historian Rosalind Krauss, as inherently narcissistic’

(Nash 2011, p.98).

My own experience of VHS has largely been driven by its ability to be instantly played back. At the beginning of Detour Off the Superhighway, I detail my childhood fascination with the instantaneous nature of the medium; a feature that convinced my younger, naïve self that I was the author of images that had simply been recorded from free-to-air television. During this experiment, I made a great deal of use of the VHS Camera’s immediate playback function. Due to the age of the camera, the feature was particularly useful when establishing whether the camera was indeed still functional and recording properly. The film documents my initial setting up of the camera, including my use of a television as a live preview monitor; a technique that, interestingly, I no longer use with contemporary D-SLR cameras. I found that this method enriched my desire to experiment with the camera’s settings while recording.

As I explain in the film, I enjoyed the low-resolution aesthetic of this camera much more than that of its DV counterpart. This, combined with the instant playback feature, made the 1976 portion of the experiment a pleasurable one and
gave me an understanding of the medium’s impact on media production upon its release.

Nash explains that ‘[v]ideo of course was not the first global art form. Film deserves that designation... Film, unlike video, was not instantaneous: it needed developing, editing and printing’ (Nash 2011, p.98). At the time of its release in the 1960s, however, Super 8 film provided a new capacity for portability and convenience. Kattelle states that ‘... with the arrival of Super 8, motion picture equipment had reached a high plateau of versatility and sophistication...’ (Kattelle 1986, p.57). Having achieved such prominence in the area of film production, it is interesting to note its continuous use within media production circles. Thomas states that although Super 8:

‘... has been superseded many times over as a home movie format, it is not obsolete today as an art medium, a professional format used in the commercial industry, or as an alternative to digital video and 16mm for low budget independent production’

(Thomas 2009, n.p.).

In the instance of this experiment, I determined that the Super 8 format was a particularly important one to examine, due to the portability of the format’s cameras, as well as its progression as a popular medium for many and varied uses through the modern day. While I had previously used 16mm celluloid for my short film Post Mortem Depression in 2007, I had never experienced the Super 8 format, other than holding a powerless camera once in a second-hand store.

During the experiment, I had truly auratic experiences with the Ricoh Super 8 400Z. It was, in fact, the first and only time since beginning the experiment that I felt the need to document events, rather than create moments, using the traditional technologies. With every other traditional camera, I created scenarios to capture and sought to document the capturing process with a D-SLR. The Ricoh camera, however, triggered something in me that urged me to document its aesthetic, an urge that still puzzles me. I believe this shift from creative to ethnographic capture of motion picture generated an aura, or what Schutt and Berry refer to as a ‘different intensity’ (Schutt & Berry 2011, p.39). Indeed, I believe the fact that the majority of the footage captured with the Super 8 camera was of a group of my
close friends in a relaxed and unplanned social setting adds my own ‘different intensity’, or personal context, to the experience of capturing and later watching that footage.

The fact that I was much less preoccupied with finetuning or manipulating the images I was capturing meant that I instead concentrated on the subjects. Without the instant playback function that the VHS camera provided, I was unable to immediately view the footage that I had just shot and view its characteristics, including the fact that almost everything I did capture turned out to be over-exposed due to a broken auto-exposure function and an unfamiliarity with the manual settings. Even with the resulting over-exposed images, there remains a personal context in the footage through the improvised presence of my close friends and my barely successful attempts to operate the camera. Ultimately, I found the experience of utilising the Super 8 camera to be an auratic one and extremely important within the scope of this project.

Some of the characteristics inherent in the Ricoh Super 8 camera were also present in the Kodak Box Brownie and the Folding Pocket Kodak. I decided to examine a number of stills cameras in this project due to Benjamin’s own focus on photography, as well as the foundation of filmmaking in the practice of photography, as evidenced by the work of Eadweard Muybridge. By using a series of stills cameras to capture the motion of a horse in 1872, Muybridge ‘unwittingly set the stage for a spectacular invention a decade later – the motion picture’ (Leslie 2001, n.p.). Hence, this project examines the use of the Six20 Brownie D Kodak, the Folding Pocket Kodak and the Pinhole Camera.

A stills photography camera, the Six20 Brownie D Kodak is a similarly portable device, developed in contrast to the heavy cameras first used by Kodak’s founder, George Eastman. Olivier writes about the importance of the Brownie camera, and the work of Eastman and the Eastman Kodak Company, noting that he:

‘... transformed the practice of photography – first in 1888 by replacing the complexities of wet-plate processing with a twenty-five-dollar handheld camera... and then, in 1900, by democratizing the snapshot with the simple and affordable one-dollar “Brownie” camera. By 1905, an estimated ten million Americans had become
amateur photographers, most of whom were previously excluded from photographic expression because of gender, age, or economic status’ 

(Olivier 2007, p.1).

I wanted to include a comparison of two earlier models of consumer stills cameras, in order to determine if there was a change in the auratic experience of using a consumer camera between 1898 and 1946. As such, I also chose to include the Folding Pocket Kodak, a camera referred to as ‘the Adam of the folding pocket camera’ (Erdcamp 2012, n.p.). The Folding Pocket Kodak included metal struts to keep the extended lenspanel in place. Erdcamp notes that:

‘[m]any folding cameras had to be extended by the photographer by pulling out the lenspanel on a rail on the baseboard. To get a sharp focused image, the lenspanel had to be extended to an exact point. A slight mistake resulted in unsharp pictures. The struts of the Folding Pocket Kodak extended themselves with the help of two springs, once pulled out an inch or so. The mechanism stopped at exactly the needed distance’

(Erdcamp 2012, n.p.).

Although there are forty-eight years between them, there are few differences in the design of these two cameras. In addition to the presence of struts on the lens panel, the Folding Pocket Kodak only differs from the Box Brownie in its leather covering, partial wooden interior and lack of an additional ‘close-up lens’. Despite the fact that I was using a camera made of leather and wood, I found the experience of using these cameras to be very similar. In both cases I stood at a similar distance from the subject I was capturing and the exposure times were comparable. As was the case with the Super 8 camera, there was no opportunity to immediately review the captured image.

Interestingly, while I often ventured out to public places with the Super 8 camera, I rarely left my house to use the Box Brownie or Folding Pocket Kodak. I believe this is due to the additional time involved in loading film into the older cameras, as well as the lack of a lock switch on their shutters instilling an apprehension that I might inadvertently expose the film to the interior of my carry case. I also found
that I reverted to more creative methods of photography: planning compositions that would critique the use of technology, rather than simply attempting to document occurrences in real time. While I used the Super 8 to document time spent with close friends, I used the Box Brownie to photograph a blindfolded woman holding a laptop computer and a smart phone, representing my desire to go online for news coverage of current events. With the Folding Pocket Kodak, I captured two young men holding unplugged Nintendo 64 controllers, which expressed my yearning for basic analogue video entertainment. While I was pleased with the thematic contents of these photographs, it was the aesthetic that the camera produced that made the images interesting to me. Having never used the Folding Pocket Kodak prior to the shoot, I was unaware of the correct increments to use when rolling the film from one spool to the other. I followed incorrect number guides and, as a result, was left with a number of double-exposed images. When viewed with the context of my lack of understanding of how to correctly use the camera, combined with the juxtaposition occurring within each frame – for instance, the controller cables from one frame superimposed above the heads of their users on the next – I believe that a feeling of aura arises from these images. My first viewing of these images, which occurred months after exposure, left me with the feeling of a ‘different intensity’.

Due to the ‘looking back’ framework of this project, it became evident that I must also investigate the use of technologies that, in turn, influenced the practice of photography. Thus, I also studied the use of Cyanotype and the form of diorama made popular in the early 1820s by Louis Daguerre, himself a later pioneer in photography.

The Cyanotype process was discovered in 1842 by Sir John Herschel, who had:

‘... experimented with the possibilities of color photography, using vegetable dyes; he also used iron salts to create a process he dubbed “cyanotype”, which produced an image in which the dominant tones were deep Prussian blue and white’

(Marien 2006, p.16).

While the images produced through Cyanotype are very different to those produced with a camera and were mostly used for scientific purposes, the process
is an important one to study due to its engagement with exposure and colour, as well as its unique approach to image capturing. Furthermore, ‘Herschel was one of the first to voice the democratic potential of photography: of the cyanotype he wrote that every person might be a printer and a publisher’ (Marien 2006, pp.16-17). Decades before George Eastman released the Box Brownie to the public for US$1.00, Herschel envisioned a feasibility in producers having wide access to the entire workflow involved in Cyanotype production. This idea is one that is also inherent in ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’: that ‘Slow Media advance Prosumers, i.e. people who actively define what and how they want to consume and produce’ (David, Blumtritt & Köhler 2010, n.p.).

Despite this, the examination of Cyanotype was an element of this project in which I was hesitant to engage. This was due to the fact that the Cyanotype process generally captures an outline of an object. There have been examples of people using celluloid negatives to produce a cyan-tinted photographic print – a technique I unsuccessfully experimented with – yet this was not the process’s original. Although I had found room for creativity in stills photography, through the use of juxtaposition of subjects and of the images themselves, I struggled to muster any kind of creative voice through this medium and instead continued down Herschel’s path of scientific recording of objects. Ultimately, while the process was an interesting one, I found it to be creatively unfulfilling.

As such, I welcomed my return to photography, choosing to imitate Nicéphore Niépce’s process of heliography, with which the first permanent photograph was taken in 1826 and which served as the basis for Louis Daguerre’s more commercially successful Daguerreotype (Haidar 2013, p.22). Edgar Allan Poe beamed about this technology, writing that:

‘... [T]he Daguerretoyped plate is infinitely (we use the term advisedly) is infinitely more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands. If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear – but the closest scrutiny of the photogenic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented. The variations of shade, and the
gradations of both linear and aerial perspective are those of truth itself in the supremeness of its perfection. The results of the invention cannot, even remotely, be seen – but all experience, in matters of philosophical discovery, teaches us that, in such discovery, it is the unforeseen upon which we must calculate most largely’

(Poe 1840, n.p.).

Like Poe, I found that the photograph is an effective means of portraying a subject, especially when compared to many other practices, such as my prior foray into the field of Cyanotype. The pinhole camera I used for this portion of the experiment was one that I made myself, using cardboard for the body and shutter, as well as aluminium for the pinhole. The images were exposed onto photographic paper. This is in contrast with Niépce and Daguerre’s cameras, which were wooden and utilised glass or silvered copper plates when capturing images. This discrepancy was due to the lack of resources or financial means to implement the original methods. The experience of using my pinhole camera, however, paralleled the photographic experiences of Niépce and Daguerre. Most notably, while the Box Brownie and Folding Pocket Kodak required only very brief exposure, the Pinhole Camera required upwards of sixty seconds’ exposure time. This led to a more calculated preparation process than with any other camera I had used before. The fact that the subject needed to be nearly static in order to achieve a well-exposed image limited potential subjects to landscapes, stationary objects and motionless people. On the one occasion that I took a photograph of a dog, the animal’s movement resulted in an interesting motion blur effect. This effect, when viewed with the knowledge that the image was captured using a long exposure, gives the image an interesting aura.

Another feature of this camera that forced me to adopt new methods was that it must be loaded in darkness and only one image may be taken before one must reload the camera. This also contributed to the need for calculated preparation prior to opening the shutter. In my experimentation with this camera and the methods involved in using it, I found that the experience provided me with a greater knowledge and context when viewing the subsequent pinhole images.
The next stage of my experiment was the most difficult for me to complete, although it was also the most interesting to reflect on. I chose to complete the experiment by examining the diorama, a process that fed directly into the advent of photography. Louis Daguerre, who was to become a pioneer in the field of photography, developed the diorama in 1822. While the photograph later sought to capture an image with a camera, the diorama was the display of a painted representation of an image, which utilised changing light and transparency of the painted surface. Flax wrote:

‘Daguerre achieved his effects with a technique known as transparent painting. He was not its inventor, but he was the first to exploit it on such a grand scale – the diorama proscenium was fifty feet wide by fifty feet high – and to animate the transparent paintings by means of special lighting effects. The diorama scenes were painted on a transparent cloth with both opaque and translucent paints. A complex system of lighting would then play on the canvas from varying angles, direct and oblique, front and back, to create the illusion of changing daylight and weather conditions, or suddenly to reveal the interior of a building, or to transform a landscape with an avalanche or a flood’

(Flax 1979, p.163).

My attempt to venture into the field of the diorama was largely unsuccessful. As I repeat throughout the film, I am immensely untalented as a painter (Timecode 00:05:00; 00:56:55). This was the first obstacle. The second was a lack of preparation, which resulted in my purchase of various grades of what I thought to be translucent material, as well as paint that was entirely unsuitable for the intended purpose. The result was a badly executed painting, which did not function as a diorama at all. Instead, I found that I had created an incompetently cartoonish self-portrait, with colours bleeding in from the opposite side of the canvas. Possessing little talent as a painter, the experience was a frustrating and seemingly futile one for me and my only wish at the time was for my self-portrait to procure a new artist. There are countless examples of filmmakers who are also artists successfully practising in different fields. David Lynch, for instance, is also
a photographer, musician, designer, and painter (Bohnacker 2013). One of my key interests in this phase of the experiment was to see how creatively fulfilled I might be without access to a camera. My creative practice does not often extend beyond the realms of film, photography, writing, and web-based remix works. What I found was that I was not creatively fulfilled at all and that I had very little patience with my lack of ability as a painter. I discuss this lack of fulfilment at this point in the film (Timecode 00:56:10), speculating that I would be unsuccessful as a creative practitioner had I lived in a time before photography. As a result, this final stage of the experiment was an unpleasant one and I regretted my attempt to engage in the creation of a diorama, until I viewed the footage that documented my failed attempt. It was in viewing this video footage, rather than the botched diorama, that I saw creative potential in this scenario; that I could confirm my fervour for the medium of photography, be it still or in motion. My experiment had begun as an investigation into Benjamin’s proposition that reproducible works could not be aурatic in the way that more traditional forms of art, such as painting, are and despite my lack of enjoyment of or proficiency in such traditional forms, I found that ‘looking back’ at these eight technologies became an interesting examination of where my true talents or passions lie.

The ‘looking back’ method utilised in this project is due to the trend in the various incarnations of theorists and practitioners resisting contemporary technology (or at
least highlighting the failings thereof) (Carr 2008; Quandt 2009; Rauch 2011).

Benjamin pointed to the scarcity of aura in modern photography (Benjamin 1935). David Lynch bemoaned the low quality of the experience of watching video on a mobile device (Sciretta 2008). Socrates lamented the implementation of the written word. In every case, more traditional technology is put up on a pedestal. In order to explore this trend, I must also look back to the experience of traditional technologies and their capacity to generate auratic work.

When selecting modern technologies with which to record footage to surround what was captured with the aforementioned traditional technologies, I made sure to look to my own contemporary practices as a media creator, as well as to further engage with the conceptual understandings embedded within this project. In other words, I wanted to utilise the cameras I would usually use in my current filmmaking practices, which would also inform the prevalence of an aura within the images produced using more traditional technologies. As an independent filmmaker, I have frequently relied on consumer level cameras in the production of my work. These have often included HDV and MiniDV camcorders and, more recently, D-SLR (Digital Single-Lens Reflex) cameras with video functionality. Conway points to modern advances in video and digital technology; how these devices have ‘... become cheaper and more portable, to the benefit of independent moviemakers and home videographers alike’ (Conway 2004, p.43). The majority of the footage shot for Detour Off the Superhighway was captured using a Canon 550D D-SLR, an inexpensive, higher range consumer level D-SLR. Additional footage was also shot using the video function of an Apple iPhone 4S, a modern technology now widely recognised as a legitimate filmmaking tool. Myers points to South Korean director Park Chan-wook, who has begun to use the iPhone in his practice, writing that it is the:

‘flexibility that is attracting filmmakers to the smartphone as a work tool. If you know what you are doing you can whip out your phone, shoot a scene pretty much anywhere and Bam! It’s in the can and ready to be edited’

(Myers 2012, n.p.).
The convenience of the format was particularly useful when shooting supplementary footage for the beginning and end of my film. I found that its portability and high-functionality (in that the device was always powered on and in my pocket immediately prior to use) offered a filmmaking experience that was unavailable when using more traditional technologies.

I decided that the best way to present my experiment was not through the production of a web series, as I had originally planned, but rather a feature-length documentary. In the same vein as documentaries such as Lumières and Company (1995), The Five Obstructions (2003) and Super Size Me (2004), this documentary Detour Off the Superhighway would follow a filmmaker, documenting the experience of ‘limits’ (Frank 2012, n.p.). While these films examine a range of subjects, they all served as informative models for my own project. When I first came to examine these works for this study, I found it difficult to relate them to my own practice. There were similarities between my work and their work, but I could not at first see the relevance of scrutinising structural or stylistic models for documentary production.

As Cunningham writes, it is important to study the practice within your field (Cunningham 2005, p.3), if you wish to engage with creative practice in a certain area. It was not until I reflected more on the nature of aura that it became apparent why this was a necessary step to take. I thought about Schutt and Berry’s idea of contextualising an image in order to discover a ‘different intensity’ when viewing it (Schutt & Berry 2011, p.39). I must position my own work in the context of others, in order to see what it is I have actually achieved by completing this project.

The main reason for producing a feature-length documentary was the influence of the aforementioned documentaries that explore filmmakers’ experiences of limits. As this forms the basis of my own experience, I felt the feature-length documentary form was an appropriate one to adopt. A characteristic that sets my film apart from these documentaries, however, is my use of ‘prosumer’ equipment, including the Canon 550D and many of the traditional cameras used in the experiment. As well as altering the experience of my practice, this prosumer equipment – in combination with my lack of a professional crew and adoption of
an autoethnographic approach – resulted in a film that was more suited to examine
the nature of aura and personal contexts. As such, *Detour Off the Superhighway*
differs from these other films by placing an exploration of auratic experience and
personal context ahead of adhering to more commercial practices.

I also considered my passion for the internet – a passion which fuelled this study –
and for remixability when making the film. While I once strived to create
completely original work, it has been through this study of the fields of media and
creative practices that I have accepted the fact that, to invoke Manovich (2005),
my work is just one train within a very large transit system. As a consumer, I find
works even more auratic when they embrace the idea of remixability. I love mash-
up, satire and parody and attempt to position these notions within my own work
whenever I find a chance. It would make sense, then, that in this project, I utilised
a style and structure that other filmmakers before me have utilised themselves;
that by examining others’ work in the context of my own (and vice-versa), I can
achieve that ‘different intensity’ in my own creative practice.

When I watch the work of these filmmakers, it forces me to reflect upon my own
experiences of making *Detour Off the Superhighway*. For instance, *Lumière and
Company* follows a group of notable filmmakers harking back to the methods of
the Lumières, ‘probing the nature and durability of the cinematic
medium... The project is a collection of short films by 41 directors that presents
itself as an aesthetic investigation of the art of cinema’ (Pramaggiore 2010, n.p.).
While it is a somewhat fragmented film, incorporating the work of so many
directors into the space of eighty minutes, its ‘looking back’ nature shares a clear
likeness with my own. This film, however, is more concerned with the specific
technology developed by the Lumières, often shifting its focus away from
the filmmakers’ experience of the camera and their practice in general. In my own
film, I wanted to deconstruct my own experience of these technologies in a much
more detailed and contemplative way. This was due to the unavoidably reflective
nature of practice-led research, as well as my engagement with the notion of aura
and my consequential desire to document my auratic or unauratic experiences of
these technologies. The positioning of each filmmakers’ short film, intercut with
their interviews and cinéma vérité footage of them using the camera, also served a
model for the structure of my film at times. I had not viewed this film until after I had completed the experiment, but I resonate with the experiences of these filmmakers, even if those experiences were not placed at the centre of the film.

Another film that served as a major influence when I was making my own was *The Five Obstructions*, a film that tracks Jørgen Leth, as his colleague Lars von Trier challenges him to remake the same short film in five different ways, each time adhering to a set of limitations in production. For example, in the first ‘obstruction’, Leth must produce a film that has no edit lasting longer than twelve frames, ‘a rule that explicitly aims to ruin through fragmentation and disunity...’ (Ogden 2009, p.60). This film has served as an inspiration to me for many years. I find the deconstruction of filmic practice to be an extremely stimulating and liberating concept; one that I had wished to incorporate into my project since I made the decision to present it as a documentary.

In addition to the fact that *The Five Obstructions* is a filmic experiment, it also features the filmmakers as subjects, placing it as a very important film within the context of this project. Cunningham writes about the ‘importance of the personal relationship between documentary directors and their subjects’ (Cunningham 2005, p.8). Due to the autobiographical nature of my own documentary, this personal relationship seemed of less concern than the ‘doubly self-fashioining’ creation of an on-screen persona (Clifford in Chanan 2007, p.249). My initial impulse, having come from a background in fictional narrative filmmaking, was to attempt to act out my reaction to various situations I put myself in. Pink and Mackley have used the ethnographic method of asking their subjects to re-enact certain routines (Pink & Mackley 2012, section 5.11). In this case, it was sometimes through the employment of such an autoethnographic process that I learned what my reaction would be before re-enacting the events for the camera. Such was the experience of working with limited resources and personnel. Despite my commitment to such processes, I was also aware of the growing trend of capturing a subjective version of reality within documentary films (Jarl 1998, p.149). It was for this reason that I treated my autoethnographic processes as research towards the creation of a documentary that incorporated elements of mash-up, satire and parody, and which also employed a narrative structure.
influenced by such films as Super Size Me and The Five Obstructions. Haskell Wexler says that:

‘[a]ll documentary filmmakers, in one way or another, by the very selection of what lens they use, what time of day they shoot, what people are in the shot, what remains in the film, and what remains out of the film, it’s all a creative process, and it is not, as some purists used to maintain, just “recording reality”. There is no “reality”’

(Wexler in Cunningham 2005, p.89).

Once I began the project, however, I felt the experience of the project itself take control. I was placing myself in situations – indeed, the entire project saw me place myself in a situation – but the reactions were genuine. I found that by placing my own experience of the project and inserting more of my genuine self, at the centre of the film, I depicted a greater amount of personal context for the viewer, thereby rendering a greater amount of honesty and aura throughout the situations within the film.

There were several occasions in which an important occurrence took place but was left undocumented. This was the case in my search for my friend Alister’s house (Timecode 00:32:30). In these instances, I took to writing down my feelings regarding the event as soon as possible, then re-enacting the scene at a later date when video documentation was possible. This was not my preference when I had planned the production of this film, yet it became a necessity given the low budget and limited resources of this project. Had I procured a substantial budget, I might have employed a crew to capture my experiment around the clock. Instead I chose to produce the film as a documentary, employing the creative filmmaking techniques I had used on previous fictional works. As such, the ethnographic routines applied in documenting the experiment served as a research method towards the production of the documentary.

There has been much debate regarding the role of autoethnography and whether there is a place for the creative presentation of such research – what some refer to as ‘evocative or emotional autoethnography’. Ellis and Bochner suppose that evocative autoethnography is ‘akin to the novel or biography and thus fractures
the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature’ (Ellis & Bochner 2000, p.744). In response, Anderson argues:

‘I applaud the energy, creativity, and enthusiasm of these scholars for articulating a theoretical paradigm for the form of autoethnography that they promote and for producing and encouraging texts (and performances) that exemplify ethnography within this paradigm. But I am concerned that the impressive success of advocacy for what Ellis (1997, 2004) refers to as “evocative or emotional autoethnography” may have the unintended consequence of eclipsing other visions of what autoethnography can be and of obscuring the ways in which it may fit productively in other traditions of social inquiry’


He champions a methodology he terms ‘analytic autoethnography’, which avoids overtly seeking ‘narrative fidelity only to the researcher’s subjective experience’ (Anderson 2006, p.386). Conversely, Denzin writes that:

‘Anderson seems to fear that we are in danger of forgetting our past... Good ethnographers have always believed in documenting and analyzing those phenomena for fellow scholars. They have gone for the best data, never losing sight of their research focus, even when studying insider meanings, including their own! These researchers were self-reflexive but not self-obsessed... They understood the value of self-understanding, but they knew that most of the time their research interests and their personal lives did not intersect’

(Denzin 2006, p.421).

This debate is an important one relating to my practice, for while I utilised autoethnographic research methods when undertaking the eighty-day experiment, I also presented my findings in the creative form of a documentary. I would argue that it is the blurring of these lines that enabled me to produce the documentary I did. Without the autoethnographic research I conducted during the experiment, I would likely not have been able to present such honest portrayals of my process when using the traditional devices. Yet without presenting my work as a documentary film and utilising creative methods in its production, I would
possibly have been limited in how I might present the findings – especially given the fierce and on-going debate regarding the validity of evocative autoethnography. Hence, while I wish to acknowledge this debate, I also wish to stipulate that the film resulting from my autoethnographic research is largely a documentary production that utilises my background as a creative film practitioner. My main goal in creating this film was to present my autoethnographic and qualitative research findings using methods that might satisfy my creative practice. Indeed it was partly through the viewing of Super Size Me, The Five Obstructions and Lumière and Company that I arrived at the notion of filming myself as a subject.

While Super Size Me might appear to contain some elements of ethnography or autoethnography, it is largely deemed a ‘situation documentary’. The film features the filmmaker as subject, following filmmaker Morgan Spurlock, as he ate only McDonald’s for one month. Hoberman points to such documentaries, which:

‘... might be characterized as “situation documentaries”, asserting their media specific realness through the use of long takes, minimal editing, behavioral performances, and leisurely contemplation of their subjects or setting. Drama is subsumed in observation. Landscape trumps performance’

(Hoberman 2012, p.24).

Due to the experiential nature of this project, I thought it best to employ this ‘situation documentary’ filmmaking style, while also informing the production of the film through autoethnography. This way, while I lived through the experience of using these various technologies, I would be able to capture a reality of the events that unfolded, thereby displaying my experiences in an honest way, and one in which the audience might share. Felperin points to the honesty that Spurlock injected into his film, describing his approach as one that made ‘the package so persuasive’ (Felperin 2004, p.69). Indeed, by aiming for an honest approach in my work and by capturing the experience in an ethnographic way, I hoped to produce a persuasive documentary, resulting in an auratic experience for the viewer.
Some argue that an autoethnographic approach might hinder the honesty of the film, however Sarah Pink writes:

‘More recently, MacDougall (1997) proposed that ethnographic documentary film should be used to challenge objectifying approaches in anthropology to emphasize the experiential and individual nature of social life and develop its potential to represent individuals and specific aspects of experience. This approach informs a style of filmmaking in which individuals rather than “whole cultures” dominate and the subjectivities of both filmmakers and subjects are appreciated’

(Pink 2001, p.139).

As it had become my intention to document and share the experience of my own individual ‘looking back’ experiment, it seemed that an autoethnographic approach was an effective means of doing so. Just as Spurlock’s film displayed his own subjectivities within the scope of his experiment, an honest and autoethnographic approach in my own project would result in a highly experiential film, placing my personal context at centre of the piece. VanSlyke-Briggs underlines this idea, writing that:

‘In addition to stimulating multiple senses, such creative writing allows the reader to enter the text through personal connections. Belenky et al. (1997) discuss the technique of eliciting readers’ response to text in their own work although the authors do not arrive at this through ethnofiction, but through personalising the traditional presentation of data. The authors state that they “would wish the reader the satisfaction of discovery and the pleasure” that they experienced throughout the process of the study...’


Although there was an increasingly more personal and genuine narrative within the film, I also felt the urge to insert more fictional or satirical elements. Again, I believe this is due to having come from a background of making predominantly fictional narrative films, most with a humorous element to them. Kenny writes that:
‘Parody is generally understood as an imitation that aims to make fun of, critically comment upon or ridicule the original... In the process of imitation, the space between original and its parodic reproduction can flag up important features of the original, even as it reverses and pokes fun at them... Parody can, therefore, have a critical function.’

(Kenny 2009, pp.221-222).

One example of a satirical moment within the film, which was written as a short screenplay, was the scene in which Socrates is informed of the invention of writing. By representing Socrates as an angry old man bemoaning the introduction of the written word, it highlights the importance and the long history of the conflict between the modern and the traditional in a more entertaining way than a simple quote could. I wanted to briefly introduce this notion at the beginning the film, but was also aware that ‘scripts based on strongly felt themes can be clumsily structured, clichéd, peopled with stereotypes, and prone to preachiness’ (Aronson 2000, p.33). Rather than present these notions in a monotonous, educational manner, I felt it best to invert the tone, employ a surrealist perspective and write a satirical scene that illustrated the same notion to the viewer. Ultimately, I sought to utilise these satirical moments to provide the viewer with a broader and more entertaining contextualisation of my experience of media technologies. Furthermore, by incorporating an element of remixability in my introduction to the topic, I found the act of representing this information to be a more enjoyable experience, bringing a ‘different intensity’ to this portion of the film. I took a similar approach when creating the 1976 VHS exploitation film, the What Other Things Can You Make a Camera Out Of? sketch (Timecode 00:52:52), and the Shakespeare in the City sketch (Timecode 00:57:40). These segments provide insight into the subjects they are referencing, while also bringing an amusing tone to the film that gives the viewer a respite from the prevailing structure.

Just as in The Five Obstructions, Detour Off the Superhighway utilised several segments to build the structure of the film. In Leth and von Trier’s film (2003), they employed the production of the five short films to navigate the structure, with each segment ending on the final version of each production. In my film, I employed a similar method, using the eight technological signposts or eras to
structure the film, with each segment ending with what I felt was the most significant experience within that segment. In some cases it was the work made within that era, while in others it was a more affecting occurrence – either a frustration I felt with a technology or an emotional response to the experience. By ending each segment with a reflection on the most honest or compelling experiences, I found that it provided more of my own personal context. Pink highlights the importance of such a subjective method, writing:

‘Indeed, the assumption that a reflexive approach will aid ethnographers to produce objective data represents only a token and cosmetic engagement with reflexivity that wrongly supposes subjectivity could (or should) be avoided or eradicated. Instead, subjectivity should be engaged with as a central aspect of ethnographic knowledge, interpretation and representation’

(Pink 2001, p.19).

Embracing this idea of subjectivity was a challenge at times. I did occasionally feel a conflict of interests, taking the roles of both filmmaker and subject; concerned that the resulting film would appear overly manipulated and narrow-minded. In the process of realising that such subjectivity made it the personal film that it turned out to be, I experimented with the idea of incorporating more subjects and ideas into the film through the use of interviews.

Having researched the work of Slow Media advocate Jennifer Rauch and Transmedia producer Steve Peters, I thought it might provide a wider context to include interviews with such theorists and practitioners. I decided to start at a more local level by interviewing writers Marieke Hardy and Michaela McGuire about their co-curated literary event entitled *Women of Letters*, in which ‘prominent women [read] out letters they have written on a particular theme’ (Ross 2013, n.p.). Since it began in 2010, the event has stressed the worth of traditional correspondence and, as such, it initially seemed relevant within the scope of the film. I therefore interviewed the pair about the value of snail mail over emails and other contemporary forms of communication.

After attempting to insert the interview, however, a clear and awkward distinction between my experiment and the interviews became apparent. On one hand, I had a
very personal portrayal of my experience of these technologies, which had been informed by careful use of autoethnography, and on the other were a series of formal interviews, only loosely connected to the rest of the film. Bernard writes that, in such cases:

‘... you find yourself telling the stories of eight people, all with different goals but perhaps a common thread... You may need to make choices as to which people best embody the themes you are trying to convey or the policy issues or areas of discrimination you want the audience to know about.... No matter what style film you’re making, you need to keep track of the one primary story you’re telling, folding in additional threads (or subplots, backstory, etc.) as they serve that one story’

(Bernard 2011, p.201).

Hence, as the interviews seemed not to serve the main story in an effective way, I made the directorial decision that it was best to adhere to the personal nature of the documentary and remove the interviews from the film, thereby concentrating on my own experience of the various media technologies. In doing so, the focus of the film remained on my own personal context, an aspect of the film that was being increasingly explored through the use of archival photography from my family’s personal collection. In addition to engaging further with Schutt and Berry’s notion of the aura of personal context, the film was adhering to Soderbergh’s idea that ‘if this filmmaker didn’t do it, it either wouldn’t exist at all, or it wouldn’t exist in anything like this form’ (Soderbergh in Brody 2013, n.p.). The photographs included images of my family and I, mostly from various times throughout my childhood. The question of how to use these images was one I deliberated on and experimented with for some time. I knew I would position the images to voice over at the beginning and end of the film, keeping the middle act exclusive to footage and images from the eighty-day experiment. For the most part, I presented the photographs using what has come to be known as the ‘Ken Burns Effect’. Breitbart explains that:

‘The technique was used extensively and effectively in “The Civil War”, where the lack of archival motion pictures made it a necessity. Burns broke down individual photographs into long shots, medium
shots, and close-ups, linked by pans, zooms, and cross-dissolves, creating visual narratives and a sense of space and time from a single two-dimensional image.... Combining these visual effects with an evocative musical score... Burns’s series captured the Civil War’s sadness and sense of loss and established a bond with a PBS audience in a way that no documentary had probably ever done before’

(Breitbart 2007, p.169).

Although the subject of my film is in a very different world to that of The Civil War (1990), I hoped to evoke a feeling that might achieve a similar bond with my own audience by using the effect to bring these otherwise static images from various cameras to life. In manipulating these images through such effects, I sought to ‘challenge conventional ethnographic documentary formats’ and ‘explore the potential of the medium further... The composition of such documentary videos emphasizes their constructedness and their authors’ selectivity’ (Pink 2001, p.150).

While the film experiments with the use of various traditional camera technologies, it is a contemporary documentary. It does not claim to be a Slow Media production, which would carry a problematic stigma surrounding the use of editing, as a result of Benjamin’s discussions of aura being eradicated upon the application of editing tools. As such, I sought to maintain a contemporary style of editing. Of the use of effects in contemporary documentaries, Cunningham writes:

‘The conventional wisdom in filmmaking is that effect techniques are not used in documentaries. Traditionally, documentary editors have not altered footage with effects, as they are seen to disturb the straightforward reality captured by the filmmakers... But in the late 1980s and ‘90s, as viewers’ sensibilities became more sophisticated, and advances in technology put graphics creation within the budgetary reach of independent filmmakers, editors started to embrace these techniques’

(Cunningham 2005, p.272).

As Cunningham suggests, there are now many examples of effects being used in documentary filmmaking, perhaps most notably in Ari Folman’s animated documentary Waltz with Bashir (2008). Kate McCurdy writes that ‘the surreal and
unreal images conjured up by the recollection of these events meant that for Folman, it was “only natural to transform the quest into animation, full of imagination and fantasy”” (McCurdy 2008, n.p.). Similarly, I sought in my film to pair a composition of still images from my childhood with the audible description of my memories from the time or an interpretation of those memories.

In one instance, when I had no photographs or video to visually represent a memory from my childhood, I went beyond the use of the ‘Ken Burns Effect’ (Breitbart 2007) in my animation. Early in the film, there is a sequence that sees me recalling my misunderstanding of the function of VHS tapes. Rather than merely verbally explain the story and its significance to the origins of my obsession with technology, I animated a composition using a childhood photograph and several other layers to give the illusion that I was watching television. A similar technique was used in the documentary The Kid Stays in the Picture (2002). Blos-Jáni explains that:

‘The private snapshots are divided onto layers, on foreground and background, using focus-effects, zoom and miming camera movement; the two dimensional pictures become three-dimensional, cues of depth are introduced and some repetitive motion is stimulated... The pictures are detached from their original contexts and meanings and function as attractive illustrations of the story...’

(Blos-Jáni 2009, p.163).

Figure 4: Still from Detour Off the Superhighway (2013), © Patrick Kelly.
From a filmmaker’s perspective, I would argue that the resulting sequence generates an aura; what Benjamin describes as ‘a peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be’ (Benjamin 1931, p.20) and what Soderbergh would call as ‘unique as a signature or a fingerprint’ (Soderbergh in Brody 2013, n.p.). As the author of the piece, I spent an extended period of time animating the sequence, all the while reflecting on my own experience of what the images represented. I was partaking in their presence. If this story of misunderstanding the function of VHS tapes was merely told through the use of a piece to camera or voice over, I do not believe that it would hold the same value within the film for the viewer. It is through the application of contemporary animation techniques to archival images that a presence is breathed into the sequence and an aura of personal context is bestowed upon the film.

The use of such techniques and technologies – both contemporary and traditional – in the making of this film is, of course, at the core of this project. Just as I found a presence within archival still images through the use of contemporary editing techniques, I sought to discover a similar presence in the experience of traditional media equipment.

Prior to beginning this experiment, my films had almost all been produced with the utilisation of contemporary equipment. The only film I had authored that contained footage shot on a motion picture celluloid film camera had been an undergraduate short, Post Mortem Depression (2007), which saw a mixture of HDV footage in addition to that shot on 16mm. The experience was problematic, with little reason for the concoction of formats, aside from the assessment brief requirements that students use celluloid film, combined with the financial burden of funding the purchase and development of 16mm stock on a student’s budget. Perhaps if I – and indeed other amateur filmmakers – had access to the kind of funding that is available to such ‘purists’ as Woody Allen and Sofia Coppola (Mandell 2012, n.p.), there would be a greater number of celluloid films produced that cinephiles, like James Quandt, might find auratic.

That aside, Post Mortem Depression was the only other project in which I operated a camera that was not contemporary. The experience further developed my technical skills and understandings of filmmaking, its methods and history. I
attempted to create a work using the selected technology from each era explored in the project. These works mostly sought to highlight a theme I felt was particularly strong in my experience of the project at each respective time, thereby further exhibiting an aura of personal context within the film in a creative ethnographic way. This was another method I used that challenged conventional ethnographic conventions, while still creatively representing my experience of the experiment at the time. For example, the short film I made using the VHS camera was produced in a 1970s exploitation style and focused on my loss of access to the internet at the 1976 stage of the experiment. In creating these pieces, I was able to experience the technologies I had chosen to investigate and present my findings in an ethnographic way that also exuded an aura of personal context.

Overall, what I discovered through this project was not so much that one camera generated a greater aura than another, but that the aura lies in the experiences of the beholder, the creator, and the subject of the work. To use Benjamin’s metaphor of glancing at ‘the outline of a mountain range’ at a particular time, the aura does not exude from the mountain through the way that you squint your eyes at the view, but through your own personal connection with the mountain; your history with it; the memory of other mountains or other sunsets or similar emotions from another time. Of course, most viewers will not have the same memories of this experience that I had, or of the archival footage from my childhood or the events portrayed in my Nanna’s photographs. Schutt and Berry point to the ‘resonant beholder’, who:

‘... recognises something about the object; they may not be necessarily sure what that something is, but a response is triggered related to memory, or perhaps a yearning for memory, or for a sense of continuity and meaning. This resonance is the visceral experience referred to by Hirsch (2008) and Bennett (2005); the ability to...
“touch the viewer who feels rather than simply sees the event, drawn into the image through a process of affective contagion”...

(Schutt & Berry 2011, p.56).

This is a phenomenon that I have also aimed for through my honest representation of the events depicted in the film. For example, when the Super 8 footage was
returned to me overexposed, I briefly thought to scrap it and start again. After some reflection, however, I felt it was an important part of the experiment to portray such events honestly; that the audience would not only understand that it was an honest representation, but also resonate with the vulnerability experienced through imperfectly capturing an image.

I believe that some of the more auratic works displayed in this film are also some of the most aesthetically imperfect. Despite the overexposure of the Super 8 footage, it was this vulnerability, combined with the connection that I felt with the subjects of that footage, which made the footage auratic. As I shot that footage— not knowing how it was going to turn out— I felt that the act of filming a warm afternoon of friends enjoying each others’ company in my own backyard was a special one. When I later received the developed footage, I was disappointed in the overexposure, but the imperfections signified my desire to capture the afternoon on celluloid, despite my inexperience with the medium, and the resulting aura simultaneously speaks of vulnerability and optimism.

Through the experience of ‘looking back’ and utilising these older technologies, I discovered that imperfections increased and the usability of each technology mostly declined the further back I went. Departing from the DV camera to the VHS one saw bulkier equipment with low quality (albeit aged and deteriorated) batteries and low functionality. The image itself was of a low resolution with unusual characteristics, such as the temporary ‘burning’ of a static image onto the lens at times, which gave off a ghost-like effect. Similarly, the long exposure times required by the pinhole camera resulted in multiple underdeveloped, motion-blurred aspects within the one photograph.

These imperfections and the lack of control one has over every aspect of the image are very much interrelated. While there are flaws in Benjamin’s declaration that photography cannot be auratic, there may be some credibility to his claim that photographic equipment lacking the ability to extensively manipulate an image may be more likely to produce aura. Absent in the aforementioned scenarios were the manipulable in-camera exposure and shutter speed settings of the more modern cameras. Rather than turn a dial, for instance, one must simply keep the shutter open for a longer period of time. This process allowed for reflection and
speculation as to how the resulting image might develop. By relinquishing immediate control over the image, there emerges a requirement of a more ‘thoughtful and reflective’ approach to the photography process.

Despite this, it is my assertion that the content of the image is the aspect most likely to exude an aura. Towards the end of my film, there is a scene in which I discover an old photo album that belonged to my late Nanna. Indeed, I saw this album for the first time when I was already deep in the process of editing the film. In it were a number of photographs of my grandparents throughout the 1930s. There were photos that seemed to be taken during their holidays, as well as a few images from other times. Some of the photographs had deteriorated over time, while others had been occupied by imperfections from the moment the shutter was pressed. Although there were some incredibly fascinating images of notable landmarks at the time, the most interesting pictures from my perspective were the ones in which people were the subjects. Previously, I had seen very few photos of my grandparents from their younger days, so to now have these images of them in their youth was a very special experience. In the film, I compare these images of my Nanna’s to more contemporary images of friends and surviving family. I highlight the evident happiness and playfulness in the photographs of both eras. While I do not always know the exact details of the personal context within these photographs – exactly where and with whom they were – these older photographs do resonate. The events depicted are ones I can feel, rather than simply seeing ‘the event, drawn into the image through a process of affective contagion’ (Bennett in Schutt & Berry 2011, p.56). It is not the fact that the photographs are from the 1930s that make them auratic, but that I can feel an aura of context emanating from the experience of viewing them.

The auratic experience of an artwork is not determined by its reproducibility, but by the context felt by the beholder of that work. The experiment presented in Detour Off the Superhighway shows that it was my connection to the content – to the people and places I was capturing – that made it auratic, as opposed to the equipment I was using to capture it. By building a context around and within these works, I was able to produce:
‘A peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be. To follow, while reclining on a summer’s noon, the outline of a mountain range on the horizon or a branch, which casts its shadow on the observer until the moment or the hour partakes of their presence...’

(Benjamin 1931, p.20).

In *Boogie Nights*, Jack Horner bemoaned the arrival of VHS, but it was not the technology he was upset about. He was upset about his loosening grip on the experience of telling the stories he wanted to tell. My own experience – of this experiment and the photographs I found from years ago – taught me that it doesn’t matter which camera one uses to shoot a video or take a picture. It simply matters that there is a connection, as a creator or as a consumer, to that image.
Chapter Four:
Conclusion

Two of my favourite moments in *Detour Off the Superhighway* were the sequence of Super 8 footage of my friends during the 1967 segment, and the discovery of my Nanna’s photo album from the 1930s. From my own perspective, both of these collections of media are auratic. In each instance, the images portray people with whom I have a connection and it is this context that I bring to them, generating a Benjaminian ‘aura’; what Schutt and Berry term ‘something that we feel but can’t put our finger on – the “different intensity”’ (Schutt & Berry 2011, p.39). Through this project I discovered that aura, or the feeling of a ‘different intensity’, can be achieved in a number of ways and that the reason it seems so difficult to define is that it is a personal feeling. There is no scientific or mathematical equation to abide by in order to achieve aura. Its presence depends on context. Schutt and Berry (2011) refer to the types of contexts that can change the way we examine images. In the case of my Nanna’s photographs, there are a number of instances where I am aware of the personal contexts of an image which have a great impact on the way that I view the photographs themselves.

In such instances, the element that makes the viewing of these images an auratic experience is not the fact that the photograph was taken using a particular model of camera and exposed onto a particular film format. Rather, it is the content and
my relationship to that content which had the greatest impact on my experience of the work.

As a filmmaker, I have always endeavoured to create work that generates a feeling of aura – for myself and for the viewer. This was my aim even before I understood Benjamin’s concept of aura or its implications. I merely wanted to make films that people might connect with; that transform a film screening or YouTube.com viewing into an experience of a ‘different intensity’. This is a notion that I hope to explore further in future research projects; applying the notions surrounding aura to more modern media projects, including web-based interactive documentary, thereby further testing the theories of Bolter and his colleagues in a practice-led methodology.

Throughout this project, I have demonstrated how other practitioners within the field have historically sought to inject aura into their work and whether the technology used has had an impact on their ability to achieve this goal. The study has examined the methodologies, epistemologies and theories surrounding the areas of Slow Media, contemporary media, cinephilia, and aura, which have guided its creative practice element: the documentary Detour Off the Superhighway.

In examining the implications of ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’, this project has contributed to knowledge that was found to be lacking in the newly established field. Although the notions behind the Slow Media Movement have a strong foundation in previous battles between the contemporary and the traditional, there is an evidential lack of contributions in the field, making this the first doctoral research project to examine the issue (David 2012).

With the art of filmmaking having become synonymous with a utilisation of the internet and the most contemporary digital media equipment, I have studied the implications of a modern filmmaker’s employment of more traditional media technologies instead. Through an examination of ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’, as well as key theorists and practitioners in the area, including Matei Calinescu (1987), Nicholas Carr (2008), Carl Honoré (2004), Maia Iotzova (2010), Henry Jenkins (2006), Spike Jonze (2010), Alan Kirby (2009), Karl Marx (1867), Mark
Malkoff (2010), Chris Milk (2010), James Quandt (2009), Jennifer Rauch (2009, 2010, 2011), and Timo Vuorensola (2008), this study has explored the theoretical frameworks surrounding the term ‘aura’, thereby leading to an examination of the works of Walter Benjamin (1931, 1935), Bolter et al. (2006), and Schutt and Berry (2011). A key assertion made by this study is that art works or media must rely on the presence of certain contexts, rather than the mere use of traditional media technologies, if they are to generate an auratic experience for the viewer. This study finds Benjamin’s notion that media becomes bereft of aura the moment one can reproduce the work is a fallacious one. Instead, through a methodological approach that includes textual analysis and creative practice-led research, this study maintains that Benjamin highlighted a perpetual conflict between the traditional and the contemporary, which has continued since the time of Socrates.

This study has utilised a careful blending of theory and practice through practice-led research – what Hamilton and Jaaniste refer to as a ‘connective model’ approach (Hamilton & Jaaniste 2010, p.39) – which was chosen to open an informative dialogue between my contextual research and practice. It has been in my application of this methodological approach that I have demonstrated that it is the experience of a work – what Benjamin explained as the following of a ‘mountain range on the horizon’ – that generates aura, rather than the technology utilised in the production of that work.

If I were to start this project over again, there are a few things I might consider doing differently. These are largely in relation to the design of the experiment presented in the creative practice element of the study. There were times during that process in which I contemplated my reasoning behind the utilisation of largely consumer equipment, rather than professional filmmaking equipment. Given the fact that earlier case studies examined in this study were inherently developed for use by professional practitioners, such as Daguerre’s Diorama, it initially seemed that the examination of professional equipment would be a natural direction for this project. For example, the French New Wave – one of the key eras in cinema history – came about partly due to the introduction of flexible, portable equipment (Bordwell & Thompson 2008, p.462). I did experiment with the idea of utilising more professional equipment at first, including at one time a
Sony PD170 Digital Video camera, with a view to sourcing other, more professional equipment for other stages of the experiment. This would prove to be a difficult and expensive task, especially for the older technologies, so I decided instead to focus predominantly on consumer technologies. This turned out to be a blessing, for it is historically in the democratisation of technology that media practices have been transformed (Olivier 2007, p.1). Furthermore, it was in utilising mostly smaller, consumer-level equipment that I was able to concentrate more on the personal experience of these technologies, thereby concluding that aura is a result of the presence of a context within a work.

A challenge of this practice-led research project was the fluidity of the term ‘aura’. Although I believed that I understood the term’s meaning and the implications of its use, I could never succinctly define it. It seems that Benjamin suffered the same difficulty, opting to specify its meaning through the use of metaphors, including the notion that aura is:

‘to follow, while reclining on a summer’s noon, the outline of a mountain range on the horizon or a branch, which casts its shadow on the observer until the moment or the hour partakes of their presence’

(Benjamin 1931, p.20).

The moment I discovered ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’, my instincts told me to avoid defining the notion of aura in concrete terms, so when it came to building a creative practice element for this study, it was a challenge to design a model for one that might encompass an auratic feeling. It was only by embracing this slipperiness that I discovered the value of the connective experience and its importance to aura.

I maintain that there should be ambiguity to the term; that something so special should be undefinable. For, if there were a formula for the guaranteed generation of aura in media, then there would be no need for ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’. Media should be auratic. It should generate a feeling of connective experience. There are many differences between the Super 8 footage of my friends and the stills photography of my grandparents and their friends in the 1930s. I will concede that it is more likely that media might take on a greater amount of aura with time, but what this project demonstrates is that being able to ‘look back’ is
not the only requisite for a piece to be auratic. Rather, for a work to be auratic, it is integral that there be a context experienced by the beholder of the image. This was a key point demonstrated through the study of works by Bolter et al. (2006), and Schutt and Berry (2011), as well as through the production of the creative element of this project, specifically in the Super 8 sequence and my Nanna’s photographs.

It was due to the context surrounding those images – the Super 8 footage captured my friends on an afternoon full of sunshine, happiness and optimism, and my Nanna’s photographs show she and her friends in similar circumstances – that I experienced a feeling of aura when viewing them.

![Image of four people from Detour Off the Superhighway](image.png)

**Figure 5: Still from Detour Off the Superhighway (2013), © Patrick Kelly.**

I do predict that some current media works that are presently lacking in aura might one day be deemed auratic. To say, however, that a work is devoid of aura by default because it is produced with a digital camera or a computer or viewed on a mobile device is clearly unsupportable. In Chris Milk’s work, by using an interface wherein each user can enter their own details to determine the setting of the video, he has created an environment in which many viewers can experience a very personalised feeling of aura. In my use of animation to tell the story of my naïve misunderstanding of VHS technology, I used modern techniques to visually enhance an otherwise undocumented tale, thereby presenting a visual
representation to provide further context of my obsession with media. It is through my use of these techniques that I can confirm their auratic qualities.

As such, this project demonstrates the usefulness of an ethnographic approach to the enactment of a practice-led methodology. Rather than through simply practising these modern techniques, it was indeed my self-reflexive methods that enabled me to understand the implications of my practice on the areas surrounding aura.

This project invites the question of whether there is there room in the field for an autoethnographic film to also use such elements of documentary, including animation, mashup, satire and parody. Detour Off the Superhighway is a film that presents research, but given the use of these creative methods, which I have used previously in fictional works, can it still be recognised as an autoethnographic work? I discussed in the previous chapter the debate between Anderson and Denzin regarding the function of autoethnography, while also highlighting the position of my own practice within the field of documentary filmmaking.

Although I utilised autoethnographic methods in the making of the documentary, I chose to use documentary filmic practice methods to present the findings of my autoethnographic and qualitative research. This is not to denigrate the role of ethnography in my work; had it not been for the self-reflexive nature of my autoethnographic approach, I would not have been able to produce the film I did, nor come to my conclusions regarding aura. It was through the use of autoethnography that I was able to present my pieces to camera (à la video diaries). In order to avoid the perceived stigma of ‘navel gazing’ or ‘self-absorption’ (Davies 1999, p.184), however, I presented the final film using documentary filmmaking methods that embraced methods of animation, mashup, satire and parody. Hence, while I maintain that my film is a documentary that presents autoethnographic research in a creative manner, I will leave open the question of whether it might be an ethnographic film to later research projects.

It was also through this autoethnographic process that I discovered that the concept of Slow Media, which I initially thought might be against the use of modern technology, is in fact a new way of stressing the importance of aura. I believe that the principles of the Slow Media Movement are compatible with the
contention of Bolter et al. that there is ‘... an ongoing crisis, in which the experience of aura is alternatively called into question and reaffirmed’ (Bolter et al. 2006, p.22) and that media should be social, timeless and patient. I also believe, however, that Rauch’s stipulation that media be ‘thoughtful and deliberate’ is an integral one to the movement and to media creation in general. This is a concept that I learned through my autoethnographic approach to the experiment and that I later presented in the film; that as a producer and a consumer, I desire to be more ‘thoughtful and deliberate’ in my use of media technologies. This idea, I believe, is integral to creating and enjoying an auratic experience.

When I first considered the notion of aura, my understanding was misguided by the flawed notion that an insistence for aura was a Luddite’s demand, as manifested in the stories of Socrates and Marx, and Benjamin’s dismissal of the power of modern photographic methods. It is through my discovery of Bolter et al.’s assertion that ‘... Benjamin was wrong if he thought audiences and producers would accept a final and irrevocable loss of aura in their popular media forms’ (Bolter et al. 2006, p.22) and Schutt and Berry’s notions of an aura of personal context that I have come to the realisation that aura is merely an indescribable – and very personal – feeling achieved when viewing a specific work of any medium one enjoys. For David Lynch, this feeling is achieved through the viewing of uninterrupted DVDs. For James Quandt, it is achieved through watching celluloid projected in a quiet, dark cinema. For Chris Milk, it seems to be achieved through a personalised online experience, which may incorporate many different platforms and interfaces. For me, it is achieved through all of these things; through naïvely watching VHS tapes as a child; through filming, then viewing impromptu Super 8 footage of my friends enjoying a sunny afternoon; through using animation to tell a story I would be unable to present visually otherwise; through looking at my Nanna’s photo album from the 1930s. This project demonstrates that the flexibility in the definition of aura allows for it to be manifested in many different forms and contexts. My assertion is that new media works can be as auratic as works created of traditional means; that an image does not have to be free of imperfections to exude an aura; and that different contexts surrounding an image can play a vital role in whether a piece is auratic or not.
I can conclude that ‘The Slow Media Manifesto’ (2010) makes some valid assertions regarding the practice and consumption of media. David, Blumtritt and Köhler’s concerns with respect to aura, for instance, highlight a credible need for the production of auratic work. While I have demonstrated the possibility for work to be auratic without being a Slow Media production, such assertions reflect an ongoing aesthetical and political debate between the modern and the traditional.

I have previously mentioned how few Slow Media practitioners there are working the in field of video. Maia Iotzova’s project appears to still be searching for funding. Instead the movement appears more preoccupied with reconsidering the way in which we consume media, with Rauch and others undergoing ‘Slow Media Diets’. It can be seen that the majority of media practitioners are rather more willing to embrace modern methods of production; a significant finding of this project demonstrated by the online work of traditional directors such as Wes Anderson and Spike Jonze. This is the direction in which many parts of the film and media industry are headed. I have discussed the emerging trend of ‘collaborative content production’, as espoused by independent filmmaker Timo Vuorensola (Joutsen et al. 2008, n.p.): a process which utilises the communicative power of Web 2.0 at almost every stage of the filmmaking process. It is important to note, however, that Anderson and Jonze continue to produce feature films in a cinematic sense, using traditional funding and exhibition models, and that audiences continue to watch them. As such, traditional methods of production will continue in the digital age, alongside a thriving new media field. Roger Ebert perhaps described this paradigm most effectively, when discussing his experience of watching a film:

‘Now we have the reality of HD in the home, and very high quality video projection in theatres. I held out against video projection for years, when it really was pretty shabby. Now I acknowledge it is pretty damned good. I prefer to see a movie in a theatrical setting but love my home setup’

(Ebert 2008, n.p.).

Yet, new media practitioners will continue to develop ways in which the experience of a work becomes more and more immersive, utilising new interfaces
and platforms to involve the viewer in the creation of the story. By utilising concepts such as ‘collaborative content production’ and by personalising online experiences, new media works will embody a feeling of aura; a ‘different intensity’; ‘a peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be’ (Benjamin 1931, p.20).

This creative practice-led project has demonstrated the implications of a filmmaker utilising traditional, rather than modern, media equipment. In its examination of the Slow Media Movement and its foundations in previous resistance between the traditional and the modern, this study has proven that the presence of aura is not dependent on the use of a traditional medium, but on the presence of a context that enhances the experience for the viewer of that image.
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Fuchs, C 2008, Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age, Routledge, New York, NY.


Irwin, K 2011, ‘Staging the Internet: Representation (Bodies, Memories) and Digital Audiences’, *Canadian Theatre Review*, vol. 148, pp. 54-60.


Schutt, S & Berry, M 2011, ‘The Haunted Photograph: Context, Framing and the


Yang, D 2010, ‘Crowdsourced Project Relies on Fans For Rotoscoping a Johnny

Filmography

Art of Observing 2008-2009, web series, Godmart, Sydney, NSW.


Candy L’Eau 2013, short film series, Prada, New York, NY.

Detour Off the Superhighway 2013, motion picture, Four Eyes Films, Melbourne, Vic.

Doctor Who 1963, television program, BBC, Birmingham, UK.


Iron Sky 2012, motion picture, Energia Productions, Tampere, Finland.


Model Shop 1969, motion picture, Columbia Pictures Corporation, Culver City, CA.

Post-Mortem Depression 2007, short film, Four Eyes Films, Brisbane, QLD.

Scott Pilgrim vs. The World 2010, motion picture, Universal Pictures, Studio City, CA.

Slacker 1991, motion picture, Orion Classics, Los Angeles, CA.

Spare 2007, short film, Four Eyes Films, Brisbane, QLD.

Star Wreck: In the Pirkinning 2005, motion picture, Energia Productions, Tampere, Finland.


The Civil War 1990, television program, Kenneth Lauren Burns Productions, New York, NY.

The Dark Knight 2008, motion picture, Legendary Pictures, Burbank, CA.


The Kid Stays in the Picture 2002, motion picture, Focus Features, Universal City, CA.

The Matrix 1999, motion picture, Warner Brothers, Burbank, CA.


Waltz with Bashir 2008, motion picture, Bridgit Folman Film Gang, Jerusalem Israel.
Dear Patrick,

Ethics Clearance
Project title: Detour Off the Superhighway: An investigative study into technology and modernity reflected through filmic practice
Applicant(s): Patrick Kelly
Register Number: CHEAN B-2000672-04/12

Your amended ethics application has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN). Your application has been approved at a Low Risk classification and will be reported to the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee for noting.

Your ethics clearance expires on 7 June 2015.

Data storage
Please note that all research data should be stored on University Network systems. These systems provide high levels of manageable security and data integrity, can provide secure remote access, are backed on a regular basis and can provide Disaster Recover processes should a large scale incident occur. The use of portable devices such as CDs and memory sticks is valid for archiving, data transport where necessary and some works in progress. The authoritative copy of all current data should reside on appropriate network systems and the Principal Investigator is responsible for the retention and storage of the original data pertaining to the project for a minimum period of five years.

Annual/Final report
You are reminded that an Annual/Final report is mandatory and should be forwarded to the Ethics Officer in December 2012. This report is available at: http://www.rmit.edu.au/governance/committees/hrcc

Amendments
If you need to make any amendments to your project please submit an amendment form to the Ethics Officer. This form is available at: http://www.rmit.edu.au/governance/committees/hrcc

Should you need any further information please contact the Chair, Assoc Prof Heather Fehring on heather.fehring@rmit.edu.au or contact Lisa Mann on (03) 9925 2974 or lisa.mann@rmit.edu.au

On behalf of the DSC College Human Ethics Advisory Network I wish you well in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa Mann
Ethics Officer
DSC College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN)