Essaying from binary to complex system: the dialogue between film critics and filmmakers.

An exegesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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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.

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Andrea Rassell
15th July 2013
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Summary

This practice-led research project takes the form of a short essay film (11:45 minutes) and an accompanying exegesis (13 000 words), exploring the dialogue between filmmakers and film critics in Australia. It is intended that the film be watched prior to reading the exegesis. It should be noted that this version of the film is for submission purposes, and further funding will be sought for post-production before the film is distributed.

The exegesis is structured in a manner that reflects the integrated nature of theory and practice, investigating parallels between the film critic/filmmaker relationship, and the experience of the reflective practitioner. In my past practice, I researched scientific visual systems. The development of my film practice led to an internal binary of analytic and creative experience. Initially I considered the roles of filmmaker and film critic as a similar binary, however, through the development of this research both of these binary systems have been broken down.

This exegesis contains a combination of academic analysis and argument, film criticism, first-person narration of the filmmaking process, and artistic self-reflection. This diverse range of voices is reflected in the form of the essay film. There are three chapters in this exegesis: the first focuses on criticism, dialogue and the experiences of my film’s subjects; the second on the experience of working as a reflective practitioner and the journey of film production; and the third continues on this journey to consider a formal dialogue in relation to other precedents of filmmaking practice.
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Introduction

In this practice-led research project, I set out to address the question: what is the nature of the dialogue between film critics and film directors in Australia? In developing this project, my thought process was informed by the apparent skewing of academic attention away from the artistic influence film critics exert on filmmakers. Much research on film critics targets their effect on box office performance and consumer evaluations (Roy Morgan Research 2010) and utilises quantitative studies (Brown, Camerer & Lovallo 2012; Eliashberg & Shugan 1997; McKenzie 2009). This trend in focusing on the commercial effects of film critics suggests that questions of film critics’ relationships with filmmakers remain unexplored.

To address this, I use the concept of isomorphic paradigms – complex systems with similar forms – to frame the research project. Isomorphism is a term most commonly associated with mathematics and chaos theory. Chaos theory applies to complex, dynamic systems and their apparent sensitivity to small changes in initial conditions – commonly called ‘the butterfly effect’ (Gleick 1987). However, as I will discuss further, the isomorphic framework has been used in the humanities (Hayles 1989, 1990; Lohrey 1997). In my research, the production of an essay film placed me in the position of both filmmaker and reflective practitioner. I argue that the latter position is isomorphic to that of the critic. Rather than cement the binary opposition of the roles of ‘film critic’ and ‘filmmaker’, this study posits a holistic and interconnected relationship, giving meaning to the role of the film critic over and above any box office influence they may yield.

1Holistic is used throughout this exegesis to emphasise whole entities rather than the sum of their parts.
In line with this holistic view, the exegesis aims to provide an equally interconnected experience. The traditional literature review has been supplemented with film-watching, and instead of comprising its own chapter, will appear throughout the exegesis. My discussion of the findings will also be woven through the second and third chapters of the exegesis, describing and reflecting upon the journey of making my film Film.Critics (2013). Due to the interconnected structure, it is necessary to locate the methodology early in the exegesis. The first chapter will subsequently: explore criticism generally; outline how the attempt at defining criticism started to break down my binary thinking of the roles of critics and filmmakers; and look at the terms by which the dialogue is enacted in Film.Critics. The second chapter begins the journey of making Film.Critics. It focuses in detail on the conception of the essay film as a space for playing out the role of the reflective practitioner. The third chapter draws on other filmmakers’ precedents of practice, and examines the formal dialogue that developed through the use of specific techniques in Film.Critics.

This research aims to broaden the conception of the role of film critics and their influence, while describing a unique theoretical framework for practice-based research. It is hoped the research will be beneficial for practice-based researchers, filmmakers and critical practitioners.

Research design and context

In this section, I describe the research design. I frame and justify the making of an essay film by using a concept from chaos theory that considers similarities within complex systems. Many practice-based

\footnote{To support this aim, and to allow my own interaction with contemporary filmmakers and critics, I have chosen to select subjects for the research from practitioners who have been active between 2000 and 2012.}
researchers are answering the question: how is your practice research? In contrast, my project, being both research through practice and about practice, begs the question: why is your research an essay film? The design that is laid out here is supported by the more in depth discussion of the mechanics of the essay form in Chapter 2.

The research question targeted the nature of the dialogue between critics and filmmakers. This led me to identify experiences, reactions, behaviours and interactions as being of crucial importance, and so I began with a binary sense of the roles of filmmaker and film critic. As my research unfolded, with the making of the film, I perceived a distinct shift (detailed in Chapter 1) away from the binary perspective. Here were people with complex roles, engaged in a complex relationship, and I sought a way of understanding them as interacting entities rather than disconnected individuals. In a sense, this was a move from order toward disorder. I resolved to break down the binary position of filmmaker and film critic in relation to one another, to allow me to see the nature of the dialogue between them from a different perspective. To do this I employed the concept of isomorphism.

An isomorphism in the dark

I have borrowed part of a model of the relationship between disorder and order from the field of chaos theory. The concept of isomorphism exists to help understand how patterns can be seen in complex systems, and I define both the relationship between a filmmaker and a critic, and the dynamic position of the reflective practitioner, as complex systems.

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3 Reflective practice is described by Schön (1983) as seeking to deepen the practice; the reflection that occurs is normally more rigorous than in practice, and this gives rise to communicable knowledge.
Isomorphisms⁴ are similarities in the forms of complex systems. A subset of features is enough for these systems to be considered isomorphic; to use a classic example, roads and alleyways, and blood vessels and capillaries, although very different on many levels, have a similarity through their structural branching in their central organising principle (see To understand is to perceive patterns [Jason Silva 2011]). I use this concept to locate and describe similarities of form between the dialogue that film critics and filmmakers have, and the internal dialogue that exists in my reflective practice. Dialogue will be discussed further in Chapter 1, but the relevant point here is that the concept of isomorphism frames the interactions between filmmakers and critics, thereby rendering apt the use of reflective practice and production of an essay film as an appropriate research method.

While often found in biology, philosophy, physics and engineering, chaos theory has been gaining credence at the intersection of the fields of literature and science. N. Katherine Hayles, known for her work in this area, developed the concept of isomorphic paradigms to explain why different disciplines approached similar problems (although from different approaches) at the same time, concluding that scientific theories are culturally influenced (Hayles 1990). Later Hayles would focus on individual texts and their isomorphisms with other scientific theories, but her conclusions often draw back to reveal an impressively broad and multi-disciplinary worldview. In contrast to Hayles’ initial complex systems, which consisted of whole disciplines, Lohrey (1997) traces isomorphisms within what he describes as three intersecting ‘contexts’ of consciousness (an undeniably complex system in itself). These contexts, both subjective

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⁴ From the Greek iso meaning same, and morph meaning form.
and universal – therefore on very different scales – act cyclically and holistically to theorise the meaning of consciousness.

Before encountering these texts, I had been struggling to articulate what I saw as an analogy between the film critic-filmmaker dialogue and myself as a researcher-filmmaker. I came to think of these situations, not as analogous, but as isomorphic. I was inspired to describe two layers within the complex system that is film culture\(^5\) : one that exists in the interactions of filmmakers with film critics, the other in my production of an essay film. Throughout this exegesis I will refer to these isomorphic layers I am positing as the ‘critic-filmmaker layer’ and the ‘reflective practitioner layer’.

My act of making a film then becomes a meta-layer in this larger system of film culture where reflection (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2) is the isomorphism through which a recursive symmetry – a repetitive reflection-action-reflection spiral – occurs.

In science, isomorphisms or central organising principles are said to be recursive symmetries (a form of pattern). In this context, symmetry refers to a structural and formative sameness, and the recursive to a ‘circular and repeating process’ (Lohrey 1997, p. 13-14). I see the reflection-action-reflection spiral as a recursive symmetry in both the process of research – the iteration with regard to knowledge, and also in the two layers of reflective practitioner and critic-filmmaker.

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\(^5\) Hayles has previously suggested a model for considering culture a complex system (1989).
Figure 1: The three dialogues.
The relationship between film critics and filmmakers, if understood through traditional social science techniques, can never be fully explicit – instead, it is asynordinate. This term describes hidden implicitness, like the way an iceberg hides the bulk of its mass under the ocean, or the nature of a wave:

Waves are explicit forms that emerge out of the implicit ocean, but they are not separate from the ocean, just distinct. Waves are asynordinate because they have explicit forms that are structured by the implicit context of the ocean (Lohrey 1997, p. 63).

Similarly, the dialogue between the filmmaker and the film critic can be largely implicit, with the explicit, sporadic, angry, anti-critic outburst (as depicted in Film.Critics. 00:45) equivalent to the frothy scum atop a wave. It is this implicitness that I have sought to access and investigate by positioning myself in the role of filmmaker. The adoption of an isomorphic framework has unfurled a complex situation for me to delve into. This complexity, or disorder (in contrast to a lack of order) can be seen as the presence of information, or even ‘maximum information’ (Hayles 1989, p. 306). In moving away from neat, succinct definitions of the two roles of filmmaker and film critic, I welcomed disorder into the research process – the dismantling of the binary perspective was achieved through these decisions.

Two texts helped me to recognise that the reflective practitioner could encompass acts isomorphic to those of the film critic and the filmmaker. Firstly, Muecke, in his essayistic work The fall (2008) ascribes the traits of percept and concept to art and criticism respectively. He then sketches out a semi-fictional love relationship where the woman is ‘masking’
herself through the use of percepts, and the man is unmasking her through the use of concepts. This leap, from considering the process of concept and percept as abstract entities to human traits, drew me to further contemplate how the intuitive and analytic existed within me, and within the film I was constructing. Secondly, Gibson’s *The known world* (2010) compares two individuals with distinct ‘modes of cognition’ (p. 2) – one of whom utilises a critical distance and has an *objective* way of working, and the other who privileges *experience* as a starting point for their exploration – together creating a new holistic view of the world. When an individual executes practice-based research, Gibson argues, the implicit experience must be made explicit through a process of understanding (intuitive experience), then explicating (analysing) and communicating what it is that you understand. This in itself was a revelation – these two modes of cognition could work together to be productive.

Extrapolating this, the isomorphic perspective points out a constant *dynamic* interaction that is playing out in the critic-filmmaker layer and the reflective practitioner layer in relation to the intuitive and analytic cognitive modes. I will discuss the act of reflection in more detail in the methods section and in Chapter 2, but the isomorphism between the critic-filmmaker and reflective practitioner layers is essentially reflection. Reflection occurs both in the act of a critic critiquing a film, and in my own reflections on my practice. This makes the *journey* of the research relevant: the film production process and the essay film, therefore, become valuable ways to experience and describe this journey.

**Methods**
I set out to make a documentary, but was progressively drawn toward the essay film. This shift, along with the essay film and its associated techniques will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. The essay form, as I have chosen to use it, exhibits reflexive and performative techniques and – equally as importantly – performs an internal dialogue and creates a formal dialogue, thereby engaging intimately with the research question in a way that would not otherwise be feasible. In this way, the essay film allows me to make visible the two isomorphic layers that structure this project.

There were two major methods used in the project:

**Production diary**

I kept a production diary throughout the research process. This was used to chart creative ideas and to provide a space for documenting reflection on the filmmaking process. It was both written and videoed, consisting of musings and reflections on the interviews and production.

Van Manen (1995, p. 34) describes different times wherein reflection may occur: ‘retrospective reflection’ and ‘contemporaneous reflection’ (that which occurs in the present moment). One of the major issues for this kind of research is recording all of the complexities of experience that stem from reflective practice. Both *Film.Critics.*, and the video diaries, captured this data – the tones of voice, the facial expressions bring back the raft of emotions and thoughts encountered during production. In a holistic way, thought that belongs to a moment is then captured explicitly (through retrospective reflection) and implicitly (in the film and video diaries). Although I do not refer directly to the video diaries in this exegesis, their...

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6 Equivalent to what Shōn (1983) called reflection-on-action, and reflection-in-action respectively.
re-watching was valuable in shaping my own critical dialogue, which is evident in the voiceover of Film.Critics.

Film production

Pre-production research

In the process of academic literature review and film research, I looked at both academic and journalistic texts. As the subjects of my film are film critics and filmmakers, it was of course necessary to read Australian criticism and watch Australian films. In addition to this viewing, I have watched many essay films to contextualise my own practice within this wider field of work. These include, Bloc-notes di un regista (Federico Fellini 1969), Histoire(s) du cinema: la monnaie de l’absolu (Jean-Luc Godard 1998), Sunday in Melbourne (Gil Brealy & Paul Olson 1958), Le mura di sana’a (Pier Paulo Pasolini 1964), Sherman’s march (Ross McElwee 1986), Sink or swim (Su Friedrich 1990), Dreaming of Jeannie: Tag Gallagher on Stagecoach (Tag Gallagher 2012).

Interviews

Interviewing as a method is commonly embedded within a professional documentary-making practice. My approach to interviewing subjects was to begin as a way to open up the potential story. I chose to perform qualitative, open and loosely structured interviews to have the freedom to explore connections between the film subject’s and my own experiences. The interviewees were: Leo Berkeley (filmmaker and academic), Jonathan auf der Heide (feature film director), Adrian Martin (film critic and academic), Bill Mousoulis (feature film director and founder of the journal Senses of cinema) and Jake Wilson (film critic for The Age).

Production and post-production
‘When I shoot, it’s like play, when I edit it’s like reflection’ (Russell, production diary, 12th May 2012). In an independent project such as this one, the shooting phase afforded me an experimental thinking process, and the experience of creating images helped inform my thought processes. When I was camera operating, even though I was ‘playing’ or experimenting, I constantly had one eye in the edit suite, on the other images already captured; this is an act of internal juxtaposition. This act of imagined construction is a form of thinking with images, whether or not these exact juxtapositions make it into the final edit.

The edit suite was a less familiar place – initially I wanted to collaborate with an editor but after starting to log and transfer my footage, I realised the value of re-watching and reworking. This was a time when a retrospective reflection and anticipatory reflection occurred very close together. I often wrote production diary entries as I edited. This process provided yet another space for reflection.
Chapter 1: The first isomorphic layer: the dialogue between critics and filmmakers

Binary beginnings

In this chapter, I focus on the critic-filmmaker layer. I describe the development of a binary opposition between my definitions of film critics and filmmakers, and how the conception of a dialogue in *Film.Critics.* helped to break down this binary perspective. I use parts of the interviews from *Film.Critics.* to exemplify how this dialogue was enacted.

Initially I constrained the scope of the project by focusing on relationships between film critics and filmmakers in the Australian context, and limiting the film’s subjects to contemporary practitioners in the two groups. Anyone who had made a feature film in the past decade was open to inclusion. However, the term ‘filmmaker’ was somewhat simpler to define than ‘film critic’.

Various terminologies for writers on film have been used, most notably: ‘film reviewer’, ‘film theorist’ and ‘film critic’ (Bordwell 2011; Fujiwara 2011; O'Regan 1996; Rosenbaum 2010; Williams & Verevis 2010). Within and across each of these personae reside differing styles, approaches, and institutional affiliations, which further layer and complicate the seemingly simple task of defining film critics.

Criticism and the critic

Current debates proffer differing versions of what film criticism is. In the absence of a clear, generally accepted nomenclature for different writers on film, I have adopted Carroll’s definition of criticism – ‘the reasoned evaluation of artworks’ (2008, p. 7) – to understand how criticism can act as a mode of communication in the dialogue between critics and
filmmakers. In order to get to this point, I will first sketch out criticism more broadly.

We are in an age when there is more media, more art and more film than ever before. Critics, as well as being influencers and predictors of what the audience views (Eliashberg & Shugan 1997), increasingly act as mediators of discussions on art. In order to debate with critics, we require an understanding of what criticism is – a meta-criticism. Due to the changing nature of criticism (in part due to a shift to the internet), rather than address criticism as a professional practice, I have chosen to frame my discussion of criticism using Carroll’s book On criticism (2008), providing a meta-critical backdrop to the dialogue between film critics and filmmakers.

In everyday vernacular, criticism is taken to mean negative criticism – a fault-finding activity – whereas ‘constructive criticism’ is used to connote beneficial, helpful, engaged criticism. However, criticism originally stemmed from the notion of judgement:

They wholly mistake the nature of criticism who think its primary nature is to find fault. Criticism as Aristotle first instituted it was meant as a standard for judging well, the chiefest [sic] part of which is to observe excellencies which should delight a reasonable reader (Dryden, cited in Gardner 1959, p. viii).

Criticism of course has expanded, post-Aristotle, beyond judgement. It has been disassembled into the components of: description, interpretation, analysis, contextualisation, classification, elucidation and evaluation (Carroll 2008; Weitz 1962). I will now look in detail at evaluation and describe how Carroll’s definition of criticism has informed the development of this project.
Both Carroll and Bordwell argue that evaluation is of intrinsic importance in defining criticism (2008; 2011). The attempt at categorisation is present in O'Regan’s (1996) nomenclature of the sub-groups of critics, namely the ‘cinephile’ and the ‘critical intellectual’, but by contrast, his groups are defined by sites of publication (film magazines, reviews and journals), rather than by their function. Chris Fujiwara describes evaluation as an outmoded descriptor of what film critics do – he says ‘criticism does not look for causes to explain some effect of the film, but seeks to heighten the effectiveness of the effect’ (2011, p. 10). This is essentially the same outcome achieved through ‘reasoned evaluation’ (Carroll 2008, p. 20).

For Carroll, reasoned evaluation is central in criticism. He stresses that it is not evaluation alone that defines criticism – it must exist in addition to one or more of the other aforementioned features of criticism. If evaluating what is of value in an artwork is the primary role of criticism, then the other parts of criticism (description, interpretation, analysis, contextualisation, classification and elucidation) serve as tools of reason for this critical evaluation (Carroll 2008). This concept of reasoned evaluation is useful here in that it distinguishes film criticism from both film reviewing and film theory. While reviewing does use evaluation, in the form of opinion or star ratings, it infrequently uses extensive reasoning. Film theory, on the other hand, suspends evaluation to ask broader conceptual questions (Bordwell 2011).

The distinction between film criticism and other writing on film is an important one to make in order to define what a film critic does. However, in Australia, which relative to Hollywood has a small film industry, with both fewer film writers and fewer established venues for publishing (O'Regan 1996; Verhoeven 2009), it is not surprising that individual writers hold multiple roles, publication outlets or intellectual frameworks.
The repercussions of this for my research are two-fold. One of these influences the methods I have adopted – if I were to be very strict on the exact definition of a critic, the already small pool of critics for me to select subjects from would be even smaller. The other is ontological – the definition of the roles of critic and filmmaker – which began as neat and binary – has become a spectrum. In addition to the role of the critic being complicated, as described above, two of my subjects who were included on the grounds of their ‘filmmaker’ status, had also written on film, and at least one ‘film critic’, had worked in some capacity in a filmmaking role. With each individual able to move between multiple roles, it became a question of what function these role definitions served; how constricting was it to use these divisions within the film production system? Both framing this situation using isomorphic layers, and the conception of a broad definition of dialogue helped to disrupt this restrictive binary perspective.

**Dialogue**

*Film Critics* used interviews to stage a dialogue between critics and filmmakers. In this section, I will define and discuss the concept of dialogue that informs this staging.

Film critics have repeatedly garnered responses from filmmakers. These take all manner of forms: letters, for example those between François Truffaut and Jonathan Rosenbaum (Truffaut et al. 1989) (in which Truffaut questions the contrariness of one of Rosenbaum’s pieces on his film *L’Histoire d’Adèle H* (François Truffaut 1975); interviews – for example

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7 Adrian Martin, when interviewed on 2 November 2012, revealed he has worked as a script editor on several films.
Geoffrey Wright and David Stratton’s disagreement over the value of *Romper stomper* (Geoffrey Wright 1992) (which resulted from Stratton refusing to even giving the film a star rating); or embedded in the film itself. This last point occurs through fictional characters who are film critics, for example the character of Harry Farber in *Lady in the water* (M. Night Shyamalan 2006), critics playing themselves, for example Leonard Maltin in *Gremlins 2: the new batch* (Joe Dante 1990) or through reference to critics, for example General Kael in *Willow* (Ron Howard 1998). This ‘bad-guy’ was named after the critic Pauline Kael, who wrote for *The New Yorker* from 1968 to 1991. However, the Australian media paint a dystopian outlook on the relationship between film critics and filmmakers (*Film.Critics.* 00:10-00:48). The responses we most hear about in popular media are those angry, brief outbursts (*Jimmy Jack Australian Film Institute speech* 2008; Maddox 2012). But what occurs under the sensationalist media surface?

At the outset of this project, I was interested in the idea that a film had the ability to act as part of a dialogue with critics. After informal conversations with directors, I saw that even those without the inclination to publicly decry the criticism their films had received, were, in some subtle way influenced by criticism. I wondered if their subsequent films in turn would become part of an ongoing dialogue. The scope of this project is not sufficient to undertake a long-form study analysing multiple films released by filmmakers; my research is not a textual analysis of films to this end. However, I did seek out fiction films that could be seen as using ‘characters’ to comment on critics in order to understand how they might

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8 One interview that cast a positive light on critics was Kenneth Lonergan interviewed on the BBC film programme (12 July 2012). He says he is a critic-phile because Peter Bradshaw and other British critics championed his film *Margaret* (2011), demanding its distribution.
be seen as participating in a dialogue.

There have been several examples of Australian critics being cast in films: Adrian Martin and Paul Harris in *Love and other catastrophes* (Emma-Kate Croghan 2003); Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton in *Hercules returns* (David Parker 1993); and Margaret Pomeranz in *The adventures of Priscilla, queen of the desert* (Stephan Elliott 1994). These instances support the notion of film critics’ involvement in the process of filmmaking, but also point to filmmakers using the critic-as-actor to comment on the art, behaviour, or role of film critics. This in itself is a form of dialogue.

Dialogue is not only the conversational utterance of a character within a script, but has much broader conceptions including as 'an ancient philosophical genre... a model for the relationship of writer and reader, and a theoretical key to the nature of language' (Womack 2011, p. 1). In linguistics, natural language refers to languages which can be learned by human infants, and are generally spoken or written. They are different from constructed languages such as computer programming languages (Holquist 2002, p. 41). In adhering to an isomorphic perspective, I argue that dialogue can comprise multiple forms of communication between filmmakers and film critics, inclusive of but augmenting natural language. Aside from criticism, emails, articles, DVD booklets and interviews, these additional forms of communication can include, of course, films themselves.

Everything I have written (i.e. the natural language I have used) during this research process does not encompass the dialogue within the reflective practitioner layer. In re-watching *Film.Critics* signs of dialogue are found, which are in turn translated to natural language and incorporated into this exegesis. However, some of the dialogue must remain embedded in the film – the impossible and undesirable task of
translating and analysing it entirely would, in any case, defeat the purpose of the project component of practice-based research. Holquist states that communication occurs in the absence of natural language:

What keeps so comprehensive a view from being reductive is its simultaneous recognition that dialogue is carried on at each level by different means. One of these means is natural language, and others have only the most tenuous relation to the way natural language works. Although it is the most powerful, natural language is only one of several ways that dialogic relations manifest themselves (Holquist 2002, p. 41).

Further, I question whether dialogue need rely on what Bertrand and Hughes call a ‘shared code’ (2004, p. 5) (for example, two people using natural language to have a conversation). I support the view that communication always occurs, even if the received message is not the one that was intentionally sent (Bertrand & Hughes 2004). Perhaps the experience of Berkeley and Wilson as discussed in Film.Critics. is unusual; perhaps it is not often that a filmmaker thinks a critic understands her or his artistic intentions. To look at this another way, the relation that dialogue enables is one of differences. If it is conceivable, as Holquist states above, that dialogue on different levels is carried out by different means, then I suggest it is conceivable that dialogue can be carried out in different isomorphic layers by different means. The critic consistently uses natural language to contribute to the dialogue posed here (with filmmakers), but a film is also capable of contributing.

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9 The importance of the subjective view of the audience must be allowed some space. Like any film there must be some mystery to allow individual interpretation. As Muecke says ‘If you know too much (all the secrets) there is nothing left for the imagination to play with, and the idea withers.’ (2008, p. 20)
Such dialogic contributions exist both between films and within films. The feature length film *Correspondence: Jonas Mekas – JL Guerin* (2011) is part of the *Correspondence* series by the Centre of Contemporary Culture, Barcelona. This is an epistolary film between the directors Jonas Mekas and José Luis Guerín. A pattern is established through Guerin’s analytical responses to Mekas’ abstract ideas. The ideas travelling between the two directors are not always perfectly understood by one another, nor is this situation a hindrance to them. For example, in one ‘letter’, Mekas corrects an observation of Guerin’s – ‘You said, I respond to life through filming. This is and is not true’. He does not elaborate further, but continues to film what seems like every aspect of his life: a snack, a friend, a bathroom, the edit suite. This film exemplifies the audiovisual medium as comprising its own dialogue and although it contains natural language, this is not constant. Meaning is undoubtedly contained in the visual.

I have argued that dialogue can exist in various forms, and that a film can contain a dialogue. As such, *Film.Critics.* attempted to use the interview to stage a dialogue between its subjects. I now look at the dialogic contributions that were discovered through the course of interviewing.

**The interviews**

In *Film.Critics.* the interviews stage a dialogue at the level of the film critic-filmmaker layer. The subjects Mousoulis, auf der Heide and Berkeley, are three very different filmmakers, in their approach and their films. Additionally, there was variation in their individual experiences of criticism, and interactions with critics. Auf der Heide reveals that his primary concern is securing funding, and expresses the belief that critics have an ability to influence this. As he is of a young generation of filmmakers, his approach to reading criticism is to read blogs and online criticism; he says
this reading was extensive after the release of his first feature *Van Diemen’s Land* (Jonathan auf der Heide 2009). Auf der Heide is at once supported by online networks (which he can exploit during the funding and distribution phases of production) but also hindered by them in terms of the negative writing on his film. In this case evaluation is key to his experience of a dialogue with critics, because it seems to be the component of criticism that auf der Heide responds to. For auf der Heide, the evaluations reflect whether audiences will come to the film, and therefore are the resonating message of the critique. But his admission that his response to wide-ranging criticism was to change genres and undertake projects which were ‘not me and not what I want to do as a filmmaker’ (*Film.Critics*. 05:28) supports the idea that critics have an ability to contribute to the development of a filmmaker’s artistic identity. As Shrum (1996) notes in his research on theatre practitioners in relation to critics, the most volatile time for an artist in response to criticism is at the beginning of their career, before they have developed a solid sense of artistic self.

By contrast, Berkeley has a more developed practice, and a different relationship to critics. Berkeley accepts that one benefit of criticism is gaining exposure for his films, but in expressing a desire to be understood by critics, he implies an expectation on behalf of filmmakers that critics’ interaction with film be more than a form of marketing support.

*It’s interesting for me as a filmmaker that often when they say those good things I say that’s fantastic but it’s not actually what I was like really trying to do with the film, it’s almost like they liked it as a misunderstanding. And I don’t really have a problem with that but it’s fantastic when you*
actually get feedback writing about the film which really connects with what you are trying to do (Film.Critics. 07:35).

His comments promote his films as central, unchanging, confident entities with criticism changing and shifting around them. This signifies a mature sense of artistic self. Berkeley here sets the scene for the dialogue that ensues with Wilson, in this case a collaboration leading to the exhibition of Stargazers (Leo Berkeley 1999).

This contrast is one example of the interactions and experiences exhibited in Film.Critics. This varied set of interactions and experiences point to a fluidity of dialogue. This conception of dialogue further deconstructed the binary understanding of the film critic and the filmmaker.

I demonstrated the possibility of a film being part of a dialogue between filmmakers and film critics in the case of auf der Heide and the changing nature of his work subsequent to his exposure to criticism. So when we consider a film to be part of a dialogue, then the production of Film.Critics. can be seen as a link to the critic-filmmaker layer. The film acts as the laboratory in which I, as a reflective practitioner, execute a reflective dialogue. The inner workings of this are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 2: The second isomorphic layer: the internal dialogue of the reflective practitioner

In Chapter 1, I outlined how critics and filmmakers interacted. As discussed in the introduction, the isomorphism – that is, the act of reflection – and the making of a film position me in the role of reflective practitioner. This chapter considers the filmic form I chose in order to play out the role of the reflective practitioner. I address the performative and reflexive documentary modes, and describe how the essay form is a useful way to encompass elements of these modes.

Developing an approach to form: the performative and reflexive documentary modes

Early in the research process, while investigating practice-based research, I realised the value of the reflexive mode of documentary. In particular, I was drawn to its ability to be explicit about the reflection of the practitioner. Then, during the pre-production process, I became interested in the performative mode of documentary, noting that it could contribute to this explication. Therefore, I will use Bill Nichols’ description of the performative mode of documentary (2010) and Jay Ruby’s conception of the reflexive mode (1980) to theorise the uptake of these modes.

It is worth noting that Nichols (2010) appreciates the fluidity of the documentary form and with his six modes of documentary (performative, reflexive, poetic, expository, observational and participatory) is not attempting to corral films into conforming to one or another sub-category. Nichols intends the modes, not to provide a strict nomenclature whereby one film falls into one category every time, but to tell us more about the way individual films operate. In this spirit, I will be referring to the
performative and reflexive modes to describe how they can come together in *Film.Critics.* under the essay form.

A hallmark of performative documentary is a shift away from realist representation. These films ‘bring the emotional intensities of embodied experience and knowledge to the fore rather than attempt to do something tangible’ (Nichols 2010, p. 202). If the performative mode privileges understanding over knowledge through emphasising subjective experience, then moments of poetry are destined to be in this type of film.\textsuperscript{10} In *Film.Critics.*, to create a sense of the perspective of the critiqued filmmaker, and of the differences between the acts of filmmaking and criticism, I partially used performative means. This was manifested in the creation of fantasy sequences, which served to express a particular subjective position. This position pertained to both the critic-filmmaker and the reflective practitioner layers. In contrast, I approached reflexivity as a way to be explicit in *Film.Critics.* about the isomorphic reflection that was occurring in the reflective practitioner layer.

Reflective practice is generally understood to be practice carried out in tandem with a *systematic reflection* on that practice (Bell 2006; Marshall & Newton 2000). The reflection that occurs is normally more rigorous than in practice alone, and this gives rise to communicable knowledge. In contrast to reflection, which may or may not be consciously incorporated into a film, reflexivity is the deliberate, considered incorporation of elements of self-aware reflection. The artifacts of reflexivity are therefore present in the

\textsuperscript{10} In the poetic mode, the onus is on the form of the film, instead of, or in addition to that of the human subjects. This mode often explores ‘temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions’ (Nichols 2010, p. 162), for example *Sunday in Melbourne* (Gil Brealy & Paul Olson 1958) with its observations of daily movements in the city. While the performative mode skews toward the poetic, there is not so much emphasis in *Film.Critics.* on formal and temporal rhythms.
product. In a research setting, using reflexive techniques provides a way of being explicit, in this case, within the film. This explicitness works together with that contained in the exegesis.

Reflexivity within audio-visual practice is described by Pearson & Simpson as the ‘capacity of film and television texts to draw attention to their existence as constructs’ (2001, p. 377). Take the following examples: direct address to camera in *Tristam Shandy: a cock and bull story* (Michael Winterbottom 2005); and the blurring of reality and fiction in *The wild blue yonder* (Werner Herzog 2005). The latter example questions ideas of documentary authenticity by juxtaposing fictional narrative with documentary footage (footage that itself poses as fiction). These types of techniques direct awareness toward the process and producer, and raise the critical consciousness of the viewer (Ruby 1980, p. 153).

The reflexive filmmaker’s explicit revelations are essential to giving the audience a thorough understanding of the filmic product:

> Being reflexive means that the producer deliberately, intentionally reveals to his audience the underlying epistemological assumptions which caused him to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, to seek answers to those questions in a particular way and finally to present his findings in a particular way (Ruby 1980, p. 157).

This statement introduces a specific implication for my reflective practice: the reflexive mode was a methodological process that allowed the reflections from the reflective practitioner layer to be incorporated into the film. The reflection then, becomes, reflexive. In addition to expressing the essential isomorphism of my framework (reflection), the technique of reflexivity is a way of baring and making open one’s approach to the
material. This laying open of thought process is one of the hallmarks of the essay. Therefore, I will now look at the essay film in more detail because of its use in combining the reflexive and the performative modes.

The essay film form

The essay film oscillates between being referred to as a genre (Alter 2007), a mode of documentary (Rascaroli 2009) and a form (Godard 1998). Genres, typically, can be categorised based on theme or combinations of theme, for example science fiction or romantic comedy. These conjure an immediate understanding of subject matter and aesthetics, which are embedded deep within a history of film-watching experience. The essay film does not have this categorical luxury. It overlaps genres and modes of documentary. This overlapping is seen as being – through its undoing of its own categorisation – a genre as 'anti-generic' (Corrigan 2011, p. 8). Yet, this is precisely what is alluring about the essay, and I was attracted by the essay’s malleability.

The use of the term essay harks back to Michel de Montaigne’s Essais (Alter 2007). ‘To essay means to assay, to weigh… to attempt’ (Alter 2007, p. 45), giving rise to an evaluative and subjective search. As a form of its own, the essay film was not articulated until 1940, when Hans Richter published The film essay: A new form of documentary film (Alter 2007).

In the 1940s, both Richter and Alexandre Astruc11 were trying to identify the components of the essay film (Corrigan 2011). Richter theorised a

11 Richter and Astruc were both practicing filmmakers. Richter had been making films since the 1920s (Suchenski 2009), and his practice led to theoretical considerations of form, whereas Astruc became an active filmmaker from 1947 (Hitchman & McNett 2008-2013), just after publication of his landmark La camera stylo.
type of film which enabled the making of ‘problems, thoughts, even ideas’ perceptible (cited in Alter 2007, p. 50). Astruc’s text La camera stylo (Astruc 2012 [1948] ) was highly influential for the essay film. It introduced the concept of the camera-pen and referred to films as being ‘written’ (Astruc, cited in Rascaroli 2009, p. 25).

Although essay films had been made (and written about) for most of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century they were not theorised in detail until the 1990s (Alter 2007). The upsurge in theoretical writing on essay films during that decade was in response to the myriad audio-visual essays that sprang from increased accessibility to, and maneuverability of, video cameras and digital editing equipment (Alter 2007; Lopate 1992).

Today, the elements that are considered essential in definitions of the essay film are those of authorship, subjectivity, reflectiveness (Corrigan 2011; Lopate 1992; Rascaroli 2009) and reflexivity (Renov 2004b). Most pointedly the essay film shows the presence of the author, often in the form of a reflective, subjective voice. A strong first person point of view is present in many essay films, for example: Le mura di Sana’a (Pier Paulo Pasolini 1964), Sherman’s march (Ross McElwee 1986) and Bloc-notes di un regista (Federico Fellini 1969). Renov infers that the essay film is ‘versatility held together with little more than the author’s voice’ (2004a, p. 70), and he continues to conclude that the essay film is a mode of autobiographical filmmaking. The emphasis is placed on the author’s subjective experience and its interaction with truth, rather than on truths themselves (Rascaroli 2009). It is important to note that it is not just the presence of the subjective, as you might encounter in autobiography or diaristic films, but a personal subjectivity which ‘tests, undoes, or recreates itself through experience including the experiences of memory, argument, active desire, and reflective thinking’ (Corrigan 2011, p. 31).
However, the definitional edges are blurred, and authorship alone is not enough to endow a film with the label ‘essay film’. Michael Moore has been called a film essayist due to the highly visible marks of authorship (Arthur 2003), but Rascaroli denies Moore’s work can ever be called essayistic due to his presentation of the material as objective, factual material and a lack of any self-questioning of his authorship (2009). In Moore’s films, one of the key elements of the essayistic is missing – reflectiveness – the interrogation of one’s own thought process, on behalf of both the maker and the viewer. The essay film must act as a vehicle for this interrogation, rendering such reflectivity, reflexive.

As described earlier, the isomorphism between the layers of critic-filmmaker and reflective practitioner is one of reflection: reflection is enacted on the film being made as practice-led research; by a critic writing about a film; and by a filmmaker making a film. This creates a dynamic interaction between the implicit experience of making a film and the explicit actions of the critic’s (or the reflective practitioner’s) experience. Thus, the isomorphism connects myself as the researcher to the film subjects creating a constant dynamic interaction with each other.

Yet, I am not the first to attempt to instill in a film the dialogic interaction between critic and filmmaker. In the following section, I give an example of a critic who uses a filmmaking practice as a way of being reflexive about his criticism; in doing so, he creates a critical dialogue within his own film. I use this to contrast with the reflective dialogue I create with Film.Critics., and also to begin to provide some practical context for my film.
Tag Gallagher: criticism in reflective practice

Tag Gallagher’s essay film *Dreaming of Jeannie: Tag Gallagher on Stagecoach* (2012; henceforth referred to as *Jeannie*) creates a relationship between footage from *Stagecoach* (John Ford 1939) and Gallagher’s own critical voiceover. This results in a distinct, essayistic, form that clearly exhibits his criticism, in addition to embodying a filmmaking practice.

*Jeannie*, through its critical reflection, reveals a holistic presentation of the reflections of Gallagher, who is both filmmaker and critic. The film’s visuals consist entirely of footage from *Stagecoach*, re-edited in such a way that it shifts and repeats beneath us. Gallagher’s voiceover stretches across his film, leading us through considerations of different shots and scenes from *Stagecoach*, a non-diegetic voice above a dissected film.

In *Jeannie*, the voiceover creates a dialogue with *Stagecoach*. It is as if he is asking of the John Ford film: is this what you’re doing? Visually, the film repeats itself, and seems to reveal its own secrets. This interplay gives an example of how a reflective practice can be instilled in an essay film. In this case the reflection is critical, so I will refer back to the original concept of criticism in order to nuance the discussion on the reflective practitioner and her place in the essay film.

Gallagher places John Ford’s *Stagecoach* under a cinematic microscope. The parts of criticism do in fact comprise this essay film. Through film, Gallagher manages to deploy each of Carroll’s terms: describe, interpret, analyse, contextualise, classify, elucidate and evaluate. Here is an example of how he does this using voiceover:

In *Stagecoach* this is the first shot of John Wayne.

*Stagecoach* made John Wayne a superstar, so it’s easy
to think that Ford gave him this grandiose introduction to build him up as *the* folk hero of the American west. The truth is Wayne had been starring in movies for 10 years; there was no reason to think he’d become a legend. Ford’s shot is bizarre – there’s nothing else remotely like it in his work – but he wasn’t introducing John Wayne an actor, he was introducing the Ringo Kid, a storybook hero in a storybook movie world, a god. Note Ringo is not alone in the shot, there is a second character, the rock formations of Monument Valley evoking eternal truths like Greek temples. Surely gods dwell here. In many other filmmakers, Howard Hawks for example, landscapes are bare, transcendentals are missing along with family, social classes, races – anything that defines people (Tag Gallagher 2012).

Gallagher contextualises Ford’s work within a greater filmmaking practice when he compares his landscapes to those of Hawks, and within socio-cultural history when, in *Jeannie*, he later describes Gatewood, the banker character from *Stagecoach*, as a caricature: ‘bankers were hated in 1939 [the year of the film’s release] lots of people had just lost their savings in bank failures’. He elucidates the meaning of the rock formations in Monument Valley and interprets the relationship between Lucy Mallory and Hatfield by excising a series of glances exchanged throughout the film. Ford’s depiction of landscape holds great emotive power for Gallagher. This is evidenced in *Jeannie* by Gallagher: discussing the characters’ place in landscape and cinematography; painting the rock formations as a character in their own right; and by delineating the border between the towns, where things are ‘corrupt and
wrong and impossible’, and the open desert, where ‘possibility is limitless’. This treatment of landscape is tantamount to analysis.

Gallagher’s evaluation of Stagecoach is subtle yet highly favourable. The voiceover in Jeannie is peppered with mentions of ‘miracles’ ‘magic’, ‘quantities of invention’ ‘precision’ and favourable quotes such as that designating John Ford ‘the best director in the history of motion pictures’ (2012). This is so much more than a film about film – it functions more adeptly as criticism, I would argue, than its written counterpart. There is some locative description in the voiceover, for example, ‘this is the first shot of John Wayne’, but the descriptive element is subsumed by the presence of Stagecoach onscreen. This is the ultimate power of the critical essay film. As we observe the excerpts from Stagecoach repeatedly over Gallagher’s suggestion of what a shot or action mean, a change occurs: the broadening perspective that is also the joy of reading criticism. Except, in contrast to written criticism, due to being intertwined with the film in front of us, this broadening of perspective is more immediate.

Gallagher also questions Stagecoach through his treatment of the film and in doing so creates a dialogue between himself (the critic-filmmaker) and Stagecoach. The first time Gallagher allows us to watch a sequence from Stagecoach the sound remains but when he plays the same scene back to us he strips the audio away, and the dialogue effectively occurs between his voiceover and the image. Ultimately, through its motifs of duration and repetition Stagecoach is given its own voice.

These shots and scenes, which he asks us to watch repeatedly, mirror Gallagher’s reflective process. Jeannie makes reflection in the critical act abundantly clear and explicit. While Jeannie expresses Gallagher’s reflection, and he has not published any associated writings, in contrast,
my reflective practice has relied more heavily on a production diary as a vehicle for my reflection. I will now explore one excerpt from my production diary and its relationship to the production of Film.Critics.

A series of reflections

Film.Critics. holds only a few of the reflections that made up the process of research, the final film is merely the tip of the iceberg.

I will discuss the interplay between a reflection on a specific incident during the production phase, and the reflection that occurs as I draw back into the role of reflective practitioner. I should preface this discussion with a couple of notes: the shots I am referring to are not in the final film, yet altered my thinking considerably; and they come from a time when I was experimenting with personifying criticism and creating a performative, fantasy journey that ‘criticism’ took over the ocean with the cinematograph – around the same time that a kind of proto-film criticism was starting to be written in 1896 (Merch 2012).

In this production diary excerpt, I was on an exterior shoot using old postcards of ships from the 1890s to represent the aforementioned journey:

I manipulate the ships; try to get a sense of the beginning of the journey. I move them; my hands are in it [the shot] now. The sun is suddenly brighter – exposure out of control. I use my hand to block a patch of sun, my fingers splayed; it suddenly becomes a mark of authorship. I think of the handprints in the Chauvel Cave, designated as the first signs of artistic authorship by Werner Herzog in Cave of Forgotten Dreams (2010). I leave it. The
ship is unseeable now, an outline at best but I move my finger around the image and it becomes like a magnifying glass revealing the nuances of the image. Could I apply this technique to the rest of the film? It’s so important that this film is shot by me. No chance of using stock footage now (21st January 2012).

This type of primary reflection is unhurried, and arguably, imprecise, yet immediate - it has use in the filmmaking process, but in addition, allows a more analytical type of reflection to later return to rigorously continue the enquiry. This later type is the reflection that is then found in the exegesis.

The exegesis acts as a meta-reflection on the primary, or artistic, reflection that occurs during production. A combination of these types of reflection appears in Film.Critics, in the form of voiceover. This stemmed from an act of reflection-in-action (whether this act was script-writing, shooting or film editing). In contrast, the analytic reflection I engage in when I re-watch the film, or write this exegesis – that is, when I focus on being the reflective practitioner – is a reflection-on-action. It therefore becomes a meta-layer for the primary reflection.

However, the effects of simultaneously reading and engaging with theory over the same months as I was shooting the film had an effect on the reflection-in-action. While I was shooting, I had the words of theorists swirling around in my head and these often influenced my own seemingly instinctive reaction to what I was shooting. For example, in writing the production diary entry above, I later considered that I was 'channeling' a book I had read by Kracauer on sleuthing (1995). The sleuth-like act of 'discovering the image', had been followed by the sleuth-like term 'magnifying glass' slipping into the production diary. Upon later reflecting
on the footage and the production diaries (enacting a meta-reflection), this seemed to me an obvious, subconscious, response to my reading on the subject of the sleuth. And so this reflective practice cannot be teased out to consider the filmmaker and researcher as separate entities because these reflections and actions are holistic.

I discussed the acts of reflection and have contrasted my own method of reflecting with that of Gallagher. For me, reflection exists in the cinematographic process in addition to the construction of voiceover. Gallagher’s reflective onus exists in the edit and the voiceover. This differential points to the essay as a versatile way of being reflexive. Mine is a working process that makes use of the poetic, the performative and the reflexive.

I have discussed in detail the process that led to incorporating the essay film with the reflexive and performative modes. I have argued that this hybrid form provides an appropriate way to explore the role of the reflective practitioner. By conceiving an essay film, I created an opportunity to both experience and express aspects of the dialogue between film critics and filmmakers. As an essay film, Film.Critics. allows a freedom of exploration of the tension between image and word, for example in the techniques of superimposition and voiceover. These are the elements I will now describe in Chapter 3.
Chapter 3: The formal dialogue between image and word

From the previous two chapters emerges a third layer of dialogue. This is a formal dialogue between the images and words within Film.Critics. This chapter will use several films to discuss the relationship between image and word in my film, setting this within the broader precedents of filmmaking practice. It is presented in two sections. The first addresses the visual textures of Film.Critics. I will use Patience: After Sebald (Grant Gee 2012) as a comparative tool to discuss the function of superimposition in Film.Critics. The second addresses aural textures. Here I will reflect upon the changing approach to voiceover in my production process.

Bazin suggests that in Chris Marker's essay films 'the primary material is intelligence, that its immediate means of expression is language, and that the image only intervenes in the third position, in reference to this verbal intelligence' (2003, para. 4). This implies that the essay film has a desire to convey verbal intelligence, or that intelligence equals verbal expression. I have attended to this issue in my own film practice, by reflecting on the aural and visual textures within Film.Critics., ultimately demonstrating how a formal dialogue developed between image and word.

Superimposition in Patience: after Sebald

Gee’s film Patience: after Sebald, creates its own formal dialogue between image and word through the superimposition of images and on-screen text. These superimpositions often comprise one or two images moving across a still image, and another image of text. In the presence of this text, the topic of the film, W. G. Sebald’s book The rings of Saturn (1998), appears almost as if its own character. Interviewees are also superimposed over a roving landscape as they discuss Sebald and his
wandering as depicted in *The rings of Saturn*. But the visual presence of text on-screen makes us constantly aware of the presence of a book: in terms of the physical quality, and the weight (or act) of reading. The juxtaposition of text, and breathlessly translucent images, propels us into a space where we are at once conscious of the act of reading, and of the hazy state of another’s imagination (i.e. the interviewee).

While superimposition is used variously in other styles and genres, I will focus on its use in *Patience: after Sebald* and its applicability to this formal relationship between image and word. In addition, superimposition has been aligned with the essayistic. Rather than the traditional usage of superimposition to represent spirits or ghosts (Bazin 1997; Natale 2012), Dulac suggests that superimposition itself constitutes cinematic thought: the act of bringing two layers of images together is in itself a way of thinking with cinema (Morgan 2011).

Richter considered the essay film as supplying 'images for mental notions' (Richter, cited in Rascaroli 2009, p. 24) implying an *illustrative* role for images. But, influentially, Jean-Luc Godard, in *Histoire(s) du cinema: la monnaie de l’absolu* said cinema was 'form that thinks and thought that forms' (1998). Within this oft-quoted statement is a sense of the importance of the holistic nature of image and word in depicting and developing thought.

When visual elements exist on different planes, as in superimposition, the viewer must 'explore alternative strategies to render the image intelligible, apart from relying on the laws of physical possibility' (Carroll 1996, p. 813). This demand for the viewer to consider and reflect on what is possible (in the unlikelihood of the viewer attempting to accept the fused images as a physical possibility) is inherently essayistic.
In *Patience: after Sebald* there is no mystery in the sense of spirits of ghosts, yet there is an otherly presence. Cinematographic superimposition’s aforementioned link to the supernatural is alluded to later in the film when one of the interviewees insists that the deceased Sebald’s image is present in a landscape photograph he took, but the film by no means uses superimposition as a method for overtly representing Sebald. However, as I noted in my production diary at the time: ‘I fell asleep one day listening to the score of *Patience: after Sebald*, and dreamt of poltergeists, only to awake uneasy, realising there is a kind of spirit evoked in this film’ (Production diary, 3rd November 2012). It is Sebald’s presence that is being recalled here. He feels as much a character as any other; both the sound and the visual techniques, not least that of superimposition, conspire to create this effect.

*Patience: After Sebald* summons the spirit of Sebald to the film, partly through the use of superimposition. *Film.Critics.* attempts another outcome. In overlaying images from the interview with auf der Heide over images of his own film, I want the viewer to consider another identity for auf der Heide, one that may or may not be influenced by criticism.

When the line of auf der Heide’s characters is superimposed over his face he seems to be reflecting on the film, perhaps saying goodbye to it. How entwined is criticism with artistic identity? He has changed and will perhaps change further with his next work in relation to what has been written about him. (Here, the use of superimposition concocts still more questions, rather than providing answers.) Although his comments are in response to bloggers, the absence of criticism clearly affects auf der Heide’s identity as an artist. He has been searching for authentic critical dialogue, and in its absence encounters a hostile plethora of unsubstantiated comments written by amateurs. Rather than dilute auf der
Heide’s image, the superimposition attempts to extend it to an imagined other – that person who he would become with critical input. His voice acts to anchor his identity in reality but the image becomes the fantasy.

Here, I analyse a second area where I have used superimposition in Film.Critics. – the section featuring Chris Marker’s response to an anonymous piece written on his oeuvre (09:15). The accompanying shoot in the graveyard was executed at a time when I was alert to the idea of the death of criticism. Rosenbaum prefaced his book Placing movies: the practice of film criticism (1995) with a short discussion on whether or not film criticism was dead, citing differing opinions among his film critic peers. Some felt the internet has led to the death of criticism, while others saw it as undergoing a revolution. When I combine superimposition of several shots of the graveyard with what I see as a subtle dialogue between an anonymous writer and a filmmaker (Chris Marker), I aim to question the shape, and future, of criticism. After reflecting on this issue and the final cut of Film.Critics. I concluded the following:

There is a timelessness in this scene, but also a possible end, an element of hope, a nod to the repeating nature of history, the iterative nature of culture, that stemmed from the consideration of the death of film criticism. I wanted fiercely to believe that it was not true that criticism is dead, but I am forced to accept that it is changing, there is a resurrection at work, and this criticism of Marker’s work brings such a resurrection to mind. The repetitive images evoke multiple realities, different possibilities – we are responsible for creating the future we want for film culture – and drawing it toward us (Production diary, 15th December 2012).
A cacophony of voices

Voiceover is the main carriage for the ‘word’ in Film.Critics. In this section I discuss the weight of the ‘word’ in the pre-production process and the development of a multitude of voices: my voice, my subjects’ voices, the personified voice of criticism and the voices of two disembodied critics.

Voiceover is a common feature of the essay film and acts as an effective way to instill authorship, subjectivity and reflexivity into such films. As opposed to films that represent a single voice, such as Su Friedrich’s autobiographic third person in Sink or Swim (Su Friedrich 1990), or Ross McElwhee’s first person in Sherman’s March (Ross McElwee 1986), my film has multiple voices.

In the beginning, I had a shifting vision of the documentary I would make. The vision wasn’t complete, but appeared like one of the scramble suits from A Scanner Darkly (Linklater 2006) – a mélange, a medley. It morphed between a journalistic piece, and a character tale, and a fractured experimental documentary. My first attempt at structure occurred through the writing of a documentary treatment. I integrated some visuals, but the onus was really on the written description. In the treatment, I experimented with traditional styles of documentary film such as the investigative documentary and the observational documentary, but I found it difficult to complete a treatment, or continue visual research, without knowing who was in my film. I therefore took the approach of shooting the interviews and allowing the structure to draw itself out of this experience. Additionally, this gave me a sort of visual baseline, from which to work.

Armed with the interviews, and an echo of Susan Sontag writing on Robert Bresson – ‘he has worked out a form that perfectly expresses and accompanies what it is he wants to say. In fact, it is what he wants to say’
(Sontag 1966, p. 3) – I attempted a thematic structure. Using the interview footage and prior research, I grouped my audiovisual material into themes. These had an ephemeral, dreamlike quality to them. I chose Metamorphosis, Nightmares, Cravings, Tantrums, Influence, Maturity, to embody the experiences I was unearthing in my film subjects.

Inspired by the story *An unspeakable betrayal* by Luis Buñuel (2002) to weave together the ideas from the interviews, I wrote a chaptered essay in the second person, addressing an absent, unidentified filmmaker. Taking on the persona of criticism gave me a sense of the relationships of the filmmakers I had interviewed, it also provided a creative space where I could translate some of those experiences to a verbal and visual story. Next, I took each chapter and filmed what each theme ‘felt’ like. There were no rules in this process. This was around the time I was exploring the performative mode. The combining of the ‘actual and imagined’ (Renov 2004b, p. 202) informed my decision to edit the interviews side-by-side with the results of the ‘themed cinematography’.

My voiceover then drew the actual and the imagined together. The images may be discrepant from the voiceover but form a closer connection as we transition from fantasy to reality. At times the voices of *Film.Critics.* are parallel, aligned, and the image or the words might flit away leaving the other alone. Otherwise, the image wriggles in the grasp of the word, and shifts uncomfortably – this can be read as a discomfort, or a questioning.

I have outlined the use of superimposition, and the way that the tension between word and image evolved throughout the pre-production process. This discussion has been in relation to the final edited version of *Film.Critics.* The techniques of superimposition and voiceover can be seen as constituting a formal dialogue in *Film.Critics.* The outcome is a subtle conversation woven together, existing on a different plane, a third layer if you will, to the dialogue between filmmakers and film critics that is more explicit.
Conclusion

From the dialogue between filmmakers and film critics, to the inner dialogue of a reflective practitioner, to a formal dialogue between image and word, this research has traced a journey of intellectual discovery.

In retrospect, I came to think of reflective practice as isomorphic to criticism. I saw myself using similar terms, to the ones I used to describe criticism in Chapter 1, for example: describing, interpreting, analysing, contextualising, interpretation, or performing these acts. In a sense, I was taking on the role of the critic in relation to *Film.Critics*.

From the feedback that Adrian Martin received from Jane Campion (*Film.Critics. 03:32*), to the screening of Leo Berkeley’s film at the behest of Jake Wilson, to the guidance Martin has given to Bill Mousoulis, and to Martin’s role as script editor – all of these examples point to a much broader dialogue than the one purported by the Australian media.

The ultimate structure of the film is dialogic itself. The isomorphic framework informs the representation of the two systems in the final film. In essence, it directs the interplay of the observational perspective (in the form of interviews) with the subjective, fantastical perspective. This illustrates my experiences as a reflective practitioner, and I have found a framework to merge the acts of making and reflecting with one another.

In selecting the essay film, I happened upon a form that became my research. More than just being the product of my research, the film became my laboratory, the space within which I experimented, played and thought. What I arrived at was an understanding of how the dialogue between film critics and filmmakers operates for my film’s subjects, but importantly I also discovered a unique way of unveiling this dialogue. The structure and functioning of this laboratory and the ability to enact the role...
of the reflective practitioner within it became as important as the exploration of the dialogue between filmmakers and film critics. The implicitness that I sought to uncover through acting as a reflective practitioner revealed itself in the form of *Film.Critics*. That a formal dialogue between image and word grew out of this laboratory of the research is testament to the essay’s ability to open and direct new avenues of thinking and discovery.

In part this project challenged me to move beyond my former training as a scientist, with its analytic way of thinking. Ironically, the exploration of other ways of thinking ultimately led back to a scientific, yet non-reductive, framework. Despite the shifts that occurred: from the oversimplified notion of the roles of film critics and filmmakers; the decision to use the essay form as an umbrella over aspects of the performative and reflexive modes of documentary; the introduction of an isomorphic framework adapted from the physical sciences – the film that was ultimately made reflected the initial desire that was, according to my production diary, ‘something poetic, without too many talking heads’ (1st July 2011).

These shifts circumscribed aspects of this exegesis: isomorphism, dialogue, essay, to create a holistic system where they informed and reflected one another. Thus, the research consists of a series of reflective dialogues.

Claude Chabrol, quoted by Molly Haskell said:

> Just as the cinema... is not a wave but an ocean; not a collection of one or two or three masterpieces but a wide and endlessly churning sea of tides and tributaries, collisions and overlappings, one film calling to, answering, and enriching another; so film
criticism is not the work of a few geniuses, but an aggregate of many brilliant and joyous and contentious voices, challenging and stimulated by one another (2001).

Although Chabrol keeps the practices of filmmaking and criticism separate, he perfectly captures the holistic and complex nature of the system of dialogue that this research has uncovered.

At the outset of the project I was searching for ways to dichotomise the roles of critics and filmmaker. In combining multiple voices I expressed my acceptance of the gamut of roles, characteristics, interests and loyalties that exist within the identity of a filmmaker or a critic. The use of multiple voices constantly reminds me, and I hope the viewer, of the plethora of opinions, experiences and subjectivities that are at play within Australian film culture. I finished the film with many voices: my voice; the voice of 'criticism'; the voices of the film’s four subjects; the voices of two disembodied critics - the disruption of the binary, by the end of the filmmaking process, has been enacted.
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Appendix 1: Ethical consent for research participation

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Appendix 2: Copyright permissions

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Appendix 3: Adrian Martin – abridged transcript

Date interviewed: 2nd November 2012
Interior, RMIT Meeting Room

08:44

Well I’ve had a lot of experiences in my life, at the edges of the production process and also film distribution and exhibition. My sort of closest tie to filmmakers was particularly through the sort of independent low-budget experimental scene - filmmakers such as Bill Mousoulis Chris Windmill, Mary Craven - a lot of people in the 80s and 90s particularly. James Clayden, the artist who’s also a filmmaker, and video artist, and with them through the sort of the force of friendship, and you know I respect them and they respect me.

I got involved in script editing and a bit of script input, you know, script consultant, script doctor, and I also did this sort of professionally, like script assessment for various companies for a while and for merchant banks and all kinds of stuff. And for me, this is a very positive thing, and with my filmmaker friends, like I always say to them, look, you can have my opinion after your film is made, and you’ve got to wear it, because I’ll be honest, even with my friends, about what I think of their work. Umm you can have my opinion after the film, or you can have my opinion before it’s finished. And you can take it or leave it, as you wish. And I liked being involved in films and the process of being made whether it's commenting on the editing, like the picture and sound editing or whether it’s working on the script, whether it’s just being a sounding board, 'cause this is something the Australian cinema really lacks is the European model of the dramaturge, which is basically someone who is just there to mind the project in terms of its, its goal, its narrative goal, its artistic goal and so on… and even people like Michael Haneke, use dramaturges right, so, but
in Australia, like we laugh at this idea, you know, oh well we've got a director, we've got a writer, isn't that enough? Isn't that professional enough? But often yeah, something gets lost in this process, of ultra-professionalism, so like I've known a lot of filmmakers, as I say more in the, this independent band that top commercial directors.

... 

18:30

Bill [Mousoulis], like with John Hillcoat, is someone who profoundly is engaged with the cinema, you know with, watching films watching a whole span of films. Not just commercial films, not just American films, but really interested in the whole span of world cinema, and with Bill, you know, he has his gods, like Robert Bresson, Roberto Rossellini and so on. And in his mind he aspires to their level, and you know each work he makes is like another little step on this sort of path to wanting to make a film that’s as good, as artistic, as intense, as interesting, as multi-layered as the films of his heroes. And something I really admire, I mean Bill is, is someone with an incredible vision about what he wants to do and he's become more and more confident of course as he’s gone along. I've worked with Bill a little bit, well, in many kinds of projects but particularly with his own film projects. I was his script editor on something. But you know you can’t script edit Bill. It’s kind of like, I have a vision, this is what this shot's going to be, this is what this scene has got to be, you know, this is what this actor has got to do, and you know and finally, you leave him to his intuition. Sometimes it will work, sometimes it won’t.