

A DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDING OF LOW AND MICRO-BUDGET FILM PRODUCTION IN THE UK

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Abstract

This thesis examines whether there is a different perspective to low and micro-budget filmmaking than has previously been understood, challenging the *Low and Micro-Budget Film Production in the UK* report, commissioned by the UK Film Council (UKFC) in 2008 to inform their policies. The introduction of this thesis illustrates how the UKFC report used inappropriate methodologies and poses the research question: would a different methodology present a perspective of low and micro-budget film production that differs from the ‘comprehensive picture’ that the UKFC claimed to portray?

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is presented as a suitable methodology, as it has not previously been used to explore film production and it enables a plurality of perspectives to be presented from across the crew. However, the participatory action of filmmaking is resource intensive and required various stakeholders to collaborate in order to address the research question. A feature-length film, *The Ballad of Des and Mo*, was shot, edited and screened as part of the Melbourne International Film Festival in 2010, and artefacts created as part of the film’s production (including a further feature length documentary following the process) are presented as evidence within this thesis. However, serious limitations were encountered within the PAR process, including incomplete data collection, contested representation of the process within the artefacts and struggles over ownership. The discussion contends that PAR within film production is unreliable, but argues that the artefacts created were still examples of low and micro-budget filmmaking, and subsequent analysis is conducted using grounded theory to establish themes within the artefacts. The outcomes correlate with wider literature and establish that the UKFC’s report was incomplete and did not present a ‘comprehensive picture’ of low and micro-budget filmmaking.

Two findings are established: the limitations of PAR in a filmmaking context and the discovery that low and micro-budget filmmaking places unique pressures on social relationships.

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1. Introduction

In June 2008, having previously noticed a growth in independent filmmaking, the UK Film Council (UKFC) published a report on Low and Micro-Budget Film Production in the UK, which had been produced by the consultancy firm Northern Alliance. In the foreword, the UKFC's Chief Executive Officer, John Woodward, said the report had been commissioned "to provide an accurate account of this part of the film production sector. The evidence they have obtained provides the first ever comprehensive picture of low and micro budget filmmaking in the UK." (UK Film Council, 2008, p.2). Under the scope and objectives of the report, the authors defined its purpose was to "establish base line data on low and micro-budget filmmaking in order to indicate the size of the low and micro-budget sub-sector, indicate the range of practice within that sub-sector and map out the policy context and environment in which low and micro-budget filmmakers are operating." (UK Film Council, 2008, p.6). The authors used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodologies including surveys, case studies, interviews and the construction of a database, in order to fulfil the aims of the report. It also contained an overview of the public sector interventions that were operational at the time to support low and micro-budget film production.

Also in the foreword of the report, John Woodward acknowledged that the growth in low and micro-budget filmmaking had "coincided with the beginning of the digital age that seems to offer the prospect of new opportunities for such films" (UKFC, 2008, p.2). The word 'coincided' suggested that they saw no evidence of a causal relationship between digital technology and the dramatic growth of low and micro-budget filmmaking, despite the fact that only 18% of films collected within their data set were being shot on traditional celluloid (UKFC, 2008, p.18). The UKFC did not get a chance to use the report to inform any meaningful policies as the organisation was abolished on the 31st March 2011 as part of the coalition Government's cuts during the financial crisis, but the report still exerts influence over policies used today by the UKFC's successors. The aim of this thesis is to challenge this report and make an original contribution to knowledge by exploring

whether there is a different perspective to low and micro-budget filmmaking than has previously been understood.

Industry perspective

In the Low and Micro-Budget Filmmaking report the UKFC described themselves as ‘supporting the creation and growth of sustainable businesses in the film sector’ (2008, p.1). This helps contextualise most of what followed in the report, as they examined the scale of employment on the films (38,500 person days – or the equivalent of 165 permanent jobs) and voiced concerns that low and micro-budget filmmaking lacked sustainability as there was no ‘business model’. Martin Spence, Assistant General Secretary from the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) was quoted:

The most common business model on illegal/irresponsible micro-budget films is for producers to compensate their failure to raise funds by getting crew/cast to work unpaid. I suppose that’s a ‘business model’ in the same sense that burglary is a ‘business model’.

(UKFC, 2008, p.35)

The report concluded that low and micro-budget filmmakers had not worked out the potential of digital technology for distribution, (in an assumption that everyone would be looking to distribute) and that “real innovation and entrepreneurship on the part of producers will be needed to develop new business models and opportunities” (UKFC, 2008, p.28). Only Peter Buckingham, the Head of Distribution and Exhibition at the UKFC seemed close to identifying an alternative aspect of micro-budget filmmaking, albeit followed by an assumption that it was part of an attempt to be ‘discovered’ by industry:

Low budget filmmakers make films because they can. They make movies because they want to, in the same way that people play music in pubs. Hope is vital... hope that the movie can be made, hope that the movie will be seen, hope that the movie may allow them a route into the industry. Perhaps the biggest distinction and value of the sector is that at its heart is a ‘can do’

ethos. Which raises an important question for organisations such as the UK Film Council... where is the point at which strategy meets motivation?

(UKFC, 2008, p.22)

This demonstrates how the Low and Micro-Budget Filmmaking report was written from the perspective of 'industry'. It was written to explore films made within a certain budget range, which is a monetary parameter. It used other parameters such as theatrical releases and festival screenings to determine success. It surveyed writers, producers and directors, but did not interview any other crewmembers, demonstrating its respect for the industrial hierarchy. The 'comprehensive picture' that they were building was one seen from an industry perspective.

The dominant model

The UKFC were not alone in taking this industry perspective, as Davenport (2006) pointed out:

The basis of their policy, therefore, is not to question the existing model but to see how they might better help their members realize their aspirations within its constraints. PACT, for example, does not perceive its role as being to help producers prevail against the domination of the 'Major' studios, which it regards as not feasible. Rather, it is active in the negotiation of industry wage rates or in maintaining the television quota at 25 percent. BECTU likewise represents its members' interests without seeking to destabilize the industry model. Skillset bases its training on a hierarchical model and strives to educate producers in financial and other matters by bringing over Hollywood producers to lead seminars. Lastly, the Film Council does not challenge the domination of the US 'Majors', since it believes this to be impossible. Instead it seeks to optimize UK production within existing constraints.

(Davenport, 2006, p.255)

Optimizing UK production within the 'existing constraints' of the US dominated model meant making the UK a competitive destination for US major studios to bring their business, including a similar structural arrangement of the workforce

and their employment status. The UK Government supported this through tax credits, perhaps because as Blair pointed out:

Outside the sector, the film industry is little understood in industrial terms although it is seen to be of great symbolic import. Numerous commentators, both academic and national and international policymakers, view the forms of organization evident in the film industry as typifying those emerging in the ‘information economy’ of the twenty-first century.

(Blair, 2001, p.149)

These ‘forms of organization’ include flexible specialism, whereby individuals specialise in very specific areas and are then flexibly recruited when needed (Christopherson and Storper, 1989) and latent organisations, whereby individuals who regularly work together as teams on projects are brought back together when a project becomes financed (Starkey et al, 2000). Whilst these modes of employment are significantly different from the studio era (individuals that were permanently employed are now temporary and self-employed), commentators such as Blair (2001), Davenport (2006), Figgis (2007) and Rowlands and Handy (2012) believed that the roles within the structure of film production have barely changed since the days of studio production and have led to

... a static industry that seeks to mitigate uncertainty by relying heavily on re-using past strategies, systems and labour to ensure successful outcomes. The common perception of project-based film organizations as more flexible, innovative and highly skilled than traditional organizations may therefore be a chimera.

(Rowlands and Handy, 2012, p.659)

Whilst the nature of the employment is different, the roles that are being performed are not. Contrary to what one might expect, it may be that the changed nature of the employment is in fact preventing change to the roles. During the studio era in the US, craft unions stemmed the numbers of people entering the workforce, and the continuous productions acted as an apprenticeship or training system (Christopherson and Storper, 1989, p.335). Over time, the dismantled studio system

and weakened unions combined with the growth of university film courses meant that the supply of workers outstripped the supply of full-time opportunities. Bechky (2006, p.4) argued that instead of the formal training and supervision of a permanent organisation, temporary organisations rely on short-term workers with the prerequisite skills and experience to perform the roles. As a consequence, there has been no demonstrable attempt to redesign work roles for greater efficiency or productivity, as there is little incentive for short-term organisations (Blair, 2001, p.163-4). Grugulis and Stoyanova (2011) believed a 'missing middle' was created, between the lack of formal or informal training for roles in temporary organisations and the need for people to have the skills prior to arriving on the job.

The value of education

The UK Film Council believed that the most valuable asset in the Low and Micro-Budget Production report lay in its addressing this gap.

For many, the main value of the sector was that it offered opportunities for talent in all departments and grades to progress within the industry.

(UKFC, 2008, p.4)

Another frequently expressed view was that low and micro-budget features were an essential step in the ladder of progression for new talent.

(UKFC, 2008, p.53)

Aside from their own endorsed training or production schemes, there was little evidence within the report to suggest that low or micro-budget filmmakers were adopting the same methods that were being used in industry. In fact, there was evidence of the opposite, especially in relation to distributing the films.

For all agents inadequate delivery materials were a major concern in respect of lower budgeted films.

(UKFC, 2008, p.24)

There is a need for producers to be properly trained in delivery.

(UKFC, 2008, p.24)

These quotes demonstrate the UKFC's assumption that low and micro-budget filmmaking was serving as an educational progression route towards higher budget productions, and everyone was using it to 'progress' in industry. However, as Mike (1997) argued:

While the craftworker has, in the main, little choice but to adopt the working practices of the organization which employs them, the independent videomaker may have considerable latitude regarding working practices
(Mike, 1997, p.17)

Perhaps some filmmakers may regard digital technology not as a chance to imitate the US dominant model but rather as a chance to approach filmmaking differently?

Paradigm shift

In fairness to the UKFC, they were tasked with a difficult set of objectives. They were supposed to be simultaneously "encouraging the development of new talent, skills, and creative and technological innovation in UK film" and "helping the UK film industry compete successfully in the domestic and global marketplace" (UKFC, 2008, p.1). These two objectives could be seen as contradictory. As Shirky noted:

...people committed to solving a particular problem also commit themselves to maintaining the problem in order to keep their solution viable. We can't ask people running traditional systems to evaluate a new technology for its radical benefits, people committed to keeping the current system will tend, as a group, to have trouble seeing value in anything disruptive.

(Shirky, 2010, p.210)

Being expected to compete successfully in an established marketplace perhaps discouraged the UKFC from seeing significant economic potential in low and micro-budget filmmaking. Nor did they perceive low and micro-budget filmmaking as an expression of technological innovation; they believed the filmmaking growth

coincided with digital technology, as opposed to being *caused* by it. They assumed that even if the filmmaking growth coincided with the advent of digital technology; it would still be conducted under the same conditions as industrial filmmaking. There is little to suggest that they considered the very nature of filmmaking could be changing as a result of digital technology. One possible explanation for the UK Film Council's assumptions were that they were operating within a particular paradigm, and were thereby not open to the possibility that the paradigm could be different. Kuhn (2012, p.11) believed that students who learnt scientific fundamentals in order to gain membership of the scientific community would rarely challenge those fundamental beliefs once inside. "Men whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice" (Kuhn, 2012, p.11). McLuhan (1967) used a comparison between a professional and an amateur:

Professionalism is environmental. Amateurism is anti-environmental. Professionalism merges the individual into patterns of total environment. Amateurism seeks the development of the total awareness of the individual and the critical awareness of the groundrules of society. The amateur can afford to lose. The professional tends to classify and specialize, to accept uncritically the groundrules of the environment. The groundrules provided by the mass response of his colleagues serve as a pervasive environment of which he is contentedly unaware. The "expert" is the man who stays put.

(McLuhan and Fiore, 1967, p.93)

This thesis posits that the 'groundrules' in the UKFC's report were the industrial ideological perspectives they adopted and the qualitative and quantitative methodologies that they chose to use to explore low and micro-budget film production with.

A particular methodology

In *Developing the Evidence Base for UK Film Strategy: The Research Process at the UK Film Council*, Steele (2004) described the operations of the UKFC Research and Statistics Unit, whose principle functions were "to originate and gather data to inform the development of UK Film Council strategy and to provide an information

service to the industry, government, the arts and cultural sector and the wider research community.” (2004, p.6). The unit’s methodologies mirrored the principles set out in the DCMS’s research strategy for 2003–2005/06, notably the importance of pursuing evidence-based policy in the creative industries (DCMS, 2003). There is evidence within the Low and Micro-Budget Filmmaking report of the UK Film Council trying to quantify and measure ‘cultural value.’ In the second paragraph of the Executive summary it acknowledges that “it is difficult to assess objectively the cultural contribution of UK low and micro-budget film” (2008, p.3), but immediately points out that some films have won awards at prominent festivals, which is labelled “culturally significant” (2008, p.3). As mentioned earlier in the rationale, the report defined filmmaking by the monetary parameter of budget range, and included calculations to quantify the hypothetical days of employment that were conducted on these films and used theatrical releases or festival screenings to represent success.

Fundamentally, the UK Film Council’s report had two methodological problems that impeded their attempt to paint a ‘comprehensive picture’ of low and micro-budget film production: the research methods they chose were limited and the way they were used were inappropriate.

Limited research methods

The UKFC sought to address the limitations of any singular research method by triangulating a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research methods, which is good practice. The limitation of this approach is that the collected data needed to be codified in order to build meaningful statistics. For example, roles on the films would be codified by the traditional industrial distinctions between directors, producers, writers etc. in the assumption that these were the distinct roles used on the micro-budget production. This may explain the earlier discrepancy whereby ‘producers need training in delivery’, when there may not be anyone on a micro-budget production identifying themselves as a ‘producer’. Whilst the size and scope of the data collection was the reason that the UKFC believed it was ‘comprehensive’, the need to codify data to shape it into something meaningful limited the complexity of the ‘comprehensive picture’ and homogenized the findings of the research.

The UKFC did try to add dimensionality by including seven, one-page case studies, which interspersed the report. The report admitted that it was inadequate but justified their inclusion as being important because of their practitioner perspective:

It is impossible to adequately represent the diversity of experience of those who contributed to the survey of films in a small number of case studies. However the short case studies in this report will hopefully provide insight into low and micro-budget film production from the perspective of some of those who make the films.

(UKFC, 2008, p.55)

However, the case studies represented examples that reinforced the overall narrative and made no meaningful departure from the ideological position expressed elsewhere in the report.

Inappropriate usage

The UKFC only surveyed a sample of filmmakers in the context of ‘industrial’ filmmaking. This was apparent in the introductory email that they sent out to filmmakers to participate in the survey:

I am writing to ask for your help with a survey of low and micro-budget film-making. It is intended that key results of this survey will be published by the UK Film Council enabling government, industry and financiers to access otherwise hard-to-find information about the scale and extent of low and micro budget film production in the UK. The findings may also be used by the UK Film Council and other agencies to target better support at this sector.

We are contacting a sample of 300 film makers who have made UK feature films for budgets of less than £1 million in the last five years, to gather their views and experiences of working in this sector.

(Carol Comley, Head of Strategic Development, UKFC, 2007)

Despite the majority of low and micro-budget filmmaking being short films, the UKFC were only interested in contacting a sample of *feature* filmmakers (i.e. films of longer length that are commonly perceived to have an economic value). Therefore this sample is not typical of low or micro-budget film production, but of low or micro-budget *feature* film production.

This sample, combined with the need to codify the responses in order to extrapolate meaning from the data, meant that the report would only present a ‘comprehensive picture’ within the parameters of the industrial film production paradigm.

What the UKFC did not account for is whether digital technology had enabled more people to participate in the process of filmmaking and in doing so derive a different set of values than those recognised in the report. Digital technology has meant that more people can afford to make films, simply for the love of it. Filmmaking can now happen without the permission of organisations that would have traditionally funded films. Are all filmmakers making movies in an attempt to join industry? Or are some dismayed by the movies that industry is making, and seeking to explore something different?

1.1. Why is this important?

It is important to understand low and micro-budget filmmaking, as the widespread belief is that most filmmakers will have a formative experience of low and micro-budget production en route to possible work on higher budget productions. It therefore applies to the majority of filmmakers. If the low and micro-budget experiences *are* formative, it is important that we understand what the experiences actually are. Sadly, it is my belief that the UKFC did not capture this information in their report, and the absence of understanding still exists. I hope to address this by developing a different understanding of low and micro-budget film production than has previously been portrayed elsewhere. I believe that researching film production through the act of producing a film may contribute to a different perspective than the industry-focused one that the UKFC provided.

1.2. The research question

This rationale has sought to demonstrate how the UKFC's 2008 report into Low and Micro-Budget Film Production was composed from the perspective of the dominant industrial paradigm. In the next chapter I would like to present the case for an alternative methodology in an attempt to answer the following research question:

- Would a different methodology present a perspective of low and micro-budget film production that differs from the 'comprehensive picture' that the UKFC claimed to portray?

This thesis aims to make an original contribution to knowledge, through both the use of methodology and the outcomes of the research project. Therefore, the structure of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter 2 examines the existing literature, presents the case for an alternative methodological approach, before explaining why Participatory Action Research (PAR) will be used as the investigative method.

Chapter 3 focuses on the application of PAR within a filmmaking context, and examines the challenges that arise as a result of using such a methodological approach, including epistemological concerns, methodological limitations and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 situates the context in which the research project took place, providing a 'reconnaissance' of the specific circumstances of the PAR process; including the relationships between stakeholders and a 'self-reconnaissance' of my own researcher positionality on the project.

Chapter 5 offers synopses of the accompanying artefacts, which constitute the data collection on this project.

Chapter 6 is the discussion, examining three key questions: What themes emerge from the PAR outputs? Do the themes differ or relate to the UKFC report? Has the process been reliable?

Chapter 7 concludes the project, revisiting the research question, considers the importance and implications of the findings before presenting recommendations for further study.

2. The Methodological Approach

In this chapter, I would like to present the case for an alternative methodology in an attempt to answer the following research question:

- Would a different methodology present a perspective of low and micro-budget film production that differs from the ‘comprehensive picture’ that the UKFC claimed to portray?

I will begin by briefly examining the context of current research into film production in order to situate the approach I will use for this thesis.

2.1. Existing approaches

The UKFC’s motivation to understand low and micro-budget film production was not helped by the fact that it is often underexplored in relation to more glamorous or mainstream cinema. Film studies as a discipline tends to focus on films that have had a theatrical release and have been seen by audiences; according to the UKFC report only 18% of the 424 low and micro-budget films made in the UK between January 2002 and January 2007 had secured such a theatrical release (UKFC, 2008, p.20). When low and micro-budget films are explored, they are often in the context of the early works of established filmmakers (e.g., Peter Jackson’s *Bad Taste*, Christopher Nolan’s *Following*, Ron Howard’s *Grand Theft Auto*), and tend to focus on the films themselves as opposed to the production experiences whilst making them.

Categorizing films by the budget used in production is an arbitrary way of considering filmmaking as it makes no reference to the form or the content of what is being discussed, just the financial means used to make it. Film studies grew out of language and literature departments within academia and shares some of the analytical tools and critical theory; it would be considered absurd for a book to be studied on the basis of how much it cost to create it. However, film production constantly straddles a business/art dichotomy, and film studies as a discipline has often been accused of failing to bridge this contrast, operating in a different orbit of industry. When film studies does focus on the mode of production (i.e. how it was

made), the reliance is on theories such as mass culture theory or Marxism, which focus on a faceless industrial mass, or auteur theory, which deifies the director's individual vision and neglects the nature of collaborative production. Whilst others have argued that aesthetic and cultural concerns in film studies are inextricably tied to the industry structure, technology and the film's status as an industrial product (Pramaggiore and Wallis, 2005, p.397), these have all tended to be anti-positivist theoretical frameworks, predominantly situated within the context of interpretivism or critical theory as opposed to the empirical research that the UKFC were searching for.

In the rationale, I argued that the positivist, empirical approach that the UKFC used to examine low and micro-budget film production was incapable of portraying a 'comprehensive picture' because of codification and inappropriate sample selection. In fairness to the UKFC, their reason for this approach was because there was little empirical research that existed previously on that topic, and they felt it was necessary. Blair (2001, p.182) believed there is a lack of historical and empirical research on filmmaking as a commercial process, engaged in the profitable manufacture of a product. Most empirical research in film production has happened in other specialist fields, using theoretical frameworks and methodologies from those fields. Blair, writing from the perspective of a human resources and organisational structure specialist, ensconced within a business school as opposed to a film school, argued that the analysis of film as a product of human labour is missing from film studies (2001, p.150). However, in recent years, an area has developed within film studies attempting to address the ideological and methodological challenges between academic theory and industry practice. Production studies, a relatively nascent field, explore topics that impact on how media products are produced.

Production studies scholars face challenges not frequently confronted in the study of media consumption and audiences. Whereas these forerunners frequently framed consumption in terms of the politics of pleasure, production studies need to conceptualize practices within the political economy of labor, markets and policy.

(Mayer et al., 2009, p.3)

This shift in focus requires a different set of analytical tools than were commonly used within film studies, and as such, production studies draws on disciplines such as anthropology, communication, cultural geography, sociology, economics and history, and appropriates a mixture of their methodological frameworks.

Production studies, in other words, “ground” social theories by showing us how specific production sites, actors, or activities tell us larger lessons about workers, their practices, and the role of their labors in relation to politics, economics and culture.

(Mayer et al., 2009, p.15)

However, low and micro-budget filmmaking has tended to be neglected even within production studies. This is possibly because low and micro-budget filmmaking is amorphous inasmuch as its production processes do not occur in fixed studios, participants are not in fixed employment (they may not even *work* as filmmakers, but engage in it on an amateur basis), and job roles may not be fixed either. Bigger budget films are much more visible in every aspect; their finance deals are announced in trade papers, pre-production and casting processes are often publicized. The shoots are regimented; streets are sealed off, star buses arrive with catering trucks. Teasers and trailers are published months in advance of the release date, often before post-production has been finished. In comparison, low and micro-budget films are clandestine, even if they do not wish to be. There are rarely the resources to fund the movie let alone to create a ‘buzz’ that would register in the public consciousness. Crews can be in single digits, equipment can fit in rucksacks and audiences may never see the finished films: low and micro-budget production is more difficult to track in every sense. It was this nebulous nature of low and micro-budget filmmaking, combined with its sudden growth and popularity, which led the UKFC to initiate their investigation.

As opposed to the language and literature origins of film studies, production studies developed from empirical fields with a different set of methodological constraints. The scientific method purports to be objective, generalizable, reliable and valid. Whilst these concepts are robust in the observable physical world, they are far more

contested in the social world (Stringer, 1999, p. 192). Applying such methods to understanding film production could be considered scientism, the uncritical application of scientific principles to inappropriate areas. There have been attempts to count and quantify data as if they are observable and verifiable to all. For example, Baker and Faulkner (1991) and de Vany (2004) have attempted to quantify aspects of film production in order to identify patterns that can predict success (or at least quantify risk in relation to the performance of existing films). De Vany explained his process:

I rely on what is called the complex systems approach. Complex systems analysis is a paradigm shift in the study of social systems. Traditionally scientists attempted to reduce behavior to elemental causes. Complex systems theory shifts the focus from reductionism to connectionism over the economic, social, artistic and institutional realm. A study of the movies based on this approach touches on the way moviegoers are connected, how they process and exchange information and why this leads to complex dynamical processes. The creative, social and economic processes are interwoven and are at the heart of the institutions that shape how the movie business is organized and does things.

(de Vany, 2004, p.256)

Even if complex systems theory could extract meaning from the many data variables that can be quantified within film production (e.g., budget, length, number of shoot days, edit days, size of cast, size of the crew, pages of script), it can still only do so in relation to the variables being identified and classified, which is in itself open to different interpretations. As mentioned in the rationale, this is a fundamental problem with adopting quantitative research methods towards film production, as there is rarely consensus amongst how to define or classify the terms. For example, the UKFC's arbitrary definition on what they considered to be a low or micro-budget film production: £1 million or under cash budget, and a feature film (i.e. excluding short films and television programmes) with a minimum of 60 minutes running time (UKFC, 2008, p.10). This attempt to codify and classify is an attempt to compare like for like, but no two scripts are produced in exactly the same way. Why may a 59-minute film that paid an eight-person crew be ignored whilst

a 61-minute film that had 25 people working for free be included? As Fawell (2008, p.30) pointed out, “No-one has, or ever will, they all agree, find the “whole equation” of the studio industry. Who’s to say what a good film is?”

Qualitative research attempts to address these challenges by having interpretive scope for differing viewpoints in filmmaking. Davenport (1996), Grugulis and Stoyanova (2011), Rowlands and Handy (2012) all used interviews for their primary research. Bechky (2006) used observation. Blair (2001) used observation, interviewing and a questionnaire survey as data collection methods as part of a case study into film production. These are robust methods, triangulated to limit misunderstanding and provide validity to the research, but they are still limited by who is being observed, interviewed and surveyed. The UKFC adopted a mixture of these methods and addressed a larger sample than anyone previously had in an attempt to have a broad understanding of low and micro-budget production, but it was still limited by the parameters they used to define the terms and the sample they identified for data collection. A further criticism of these approaches is the aloof, detached nature of the researcher. Even with qualitative research methods to capture the subjectivity of different viewpoints, interpretivist researchers are detached themselves. For example, the UKFC did not commission low and micro-budget filmmakers to represent themselves; they chose a consultancy firm (albeit with media experience). Wallis (2007, p.155) believed a postmodern approach to research should be collaborative and cooperative, blurring the line between researcher and researched, participatory throughout the research process and operating in the ‘real’ world instead of artificially structured and simplified environments (i.e. researching *through* practice as opposed to researching *into* practice).

Within film studies, postmodernist theory has usually been applied to the film text, although it has had an influence on the film production process itself through movements that have rejected representation through Hollywood’s dominant model (e.g., ‘third cinema’). Postmodern theory questions rigidly defined work practices, hierarchical organizational structures, and centralised decision-making by an organizational elite. Stringer (1999, p.202) believed that amongst other things, postmodern theory emphasised:

- Pluralistic, organic strategies for development
- Preference for what is multiple, for difference
- Flexibility and mobility of organizational arrangements
- Local creation of texts, techniques and practices
- Flexibility in defining the work people will do
- Restructuring of relations of authority.

Most crucially, Denizen and Lincoln (2005, p.20) asserted that whilst postmodernist research does critique the status quo, it also makes efforts to *change* it, which is notably absent from the methodological approaches explored earlier.

These factors of participation, scepticism of the dominant model, and a desire to change the status quo influenced my decision to choose Participatory Action Research as an alternative methodological framework that may present a different perspective of low and micro-budget film production than the ‘comprehensive picture’ the UKFC claimed to portray. Next I will present Action Research (AR) as a methodological framework before concluding with why I believe Participatory Action Research (PAR) in particular, is suitable for this research question.

2.2. Action research (AR): a brief introduction

Action Research (AR) is form of participatory social research conducted by a team including a researcher and ‘stakeholders’ from an organization or community, who are seeking to improve the participants’ situation (Greenwood and Levin, 2006, p.3).

It is a process that follows a cycle in which practice is improved by systematically oscillating between practice and inquiry into it (Tripp, 2015, no pagination). Kurt Lewin, commonly cited as the man who popularised the term ‘action research’ in the 1940s, was involved in improving relations within industrial contexts and believed this sort of participatory procedure was more effective in solving problems of human interrelationships than an imposed, structured process, into which people were expected to fit (McNiff, 1988, p.3).

The defined stages of the AR cycle differ between the various interpretations that exist. Kock et al. (1997, p.9) suggested that there are five stages: *diagnosing, action planning, action taking, evaluating, specifying learning*. Herr and Anderson (2014, p.5) identified four stages: *planning, action, observation, reflection*. I found that the semantics of *evaluation* and *reflection* were rarely addressed within AR literature, and were often used interchangeably. Whilst these stages can be enacted in a single cycle, they are more commonly recognised as a connected set of cycles, known as a *spiral* (Open University, 2005, p.5), yet no one specifies a fixed number, or if indeed multiples are necessary.

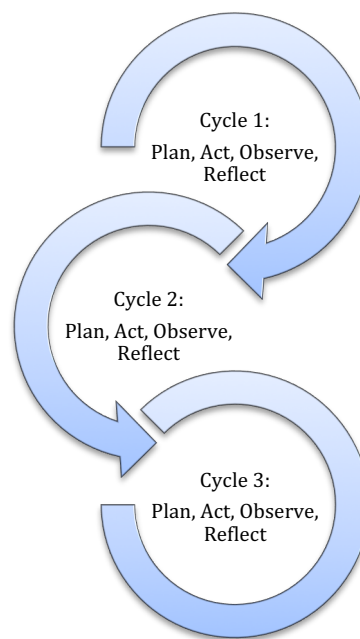


Figure 1 The Action Research "Spiral"

There are also differing opinions over which of these stages of the cycle are intended to be participatory. Greenwood and Levin (2006, p.28) believed that originally in AR, researchers made their analyses, recommended new organizational designs, and implemented changes and then assessed the effects, but with minimal consultation with the local participants. This approach to AR was effectively the 'expert' model in action. Levin (1999, p.26) believed this was because American academia at that time allowed little freedom to break out of the barriers defined by positivistic social science. This lack of support from academia meant that early AR in the U.S. was contracted and paid for by businesses and

focused on organisational development in the core interest of the power elite (Levin, 1999, p.26).

Meanwhile, in the post-war social democratic movements of Europe and Scandinavia, AR was developing as a more participatory process aimed at improving the broader quality of life of the participants. AR tended to take place in settings characterised by conflicting values and an unequal distribution of resources and power (Herr and Anderson, 2014, p.4). A significant historical example of AR would be the Tavistock Institute's study of English coal mines, where the introduction of new mechanized equipment had not led to the expected increase in productivity.

The board overseeing the coal mines commissioned research on this issue, and Tavistock got the contract. The resulting, and now famous, study by Trist and Bamforth (1951) shows how production technology and work organization are linked inextricably. These authors show that the lack of improved performance can be explained by the incompatibility between the demands created by the technology and what is beneficial for the workers as a group of interacting human beings.

(Greenwood and Levin, 2006, p.18)

The differing approaches on either side of the Atlantic contributed to circumstances whereby AR began to fragment into different interpretations as to how the research should be conducted and the theoretical frameworks under which it must operate (see Section 2.2.2. – Types of AR). However, there are certain principles that underlie all types of recent concepts of AR, which shall be explored first.

2.2.1. Principles of AR.

Despite various interpretations as to what AR must encompass, most concur that the process must incorporate three fundamental elements: action, research, and

participation. I shall examine three recent, alternative perspectives and then compare them for similarities and differences.

Zuber-Skerritt (1996, p.85) used an acronym (CRASP) to demonstrate the principles of AR:

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

In contrast to CRASP, Winter (1996, p.13) believed there are six principles that are central to the action research process. They are:

- Reflexive critique - becoming aware of our own perceptual biases;
- Dialectic critique - understanding the relationships between the elements that make up various phenomena in our context;
- Collaboration - everyone's view is taken as a view to understanding the situation;
- Risking disturbance - understanding our own taken-for-granted processes and willingness to submit them to critique;
- Creating plural structures - developing various accounts and critiques, rather than a single authoritative interpretation;
- Theory and practice internalised - seeing theory and practice as two interdependent yet complimentary phases of the change process.

Greenwood and Levin (2006, p.63) have a different set of criteria to that they deem central to AR projects:

- AR is context bound and addresses real-life problems holistically.
- AR is inquiry through which participants and researchers cogenerate knowledge using collaborative communicative processes in which all participants' contributions are taken seriously.
- AR treats the diversity of experiences and capacities within the local group as an opportunity for the enrichment of the research-action process.

- The meanings constructed in the inquiry process lead to social action, or these reflections on action lead the construction of new meanings.
- The credibility-validity of AR knowledge is measured according to whether actions that arise from it solve problems (workability) and increase participants' control over their own situations.

If these principles are organised into a table, whereby the similar principles are aligned but the differences are not, it is easier to identify the commonality of their criteria.

Table 1 Comparison of Action Research Principles

Zuber-Skerritt	Winter	Greenwood and Levin
Critical enquiry	Dialectic critique	Context bound
Reflective	Risking disturbance/ Reflexive critique	Reflections on action construct new meanings
Accountable		
Self-evaluating practice	Theory and practice internalised	Inquiry leads to action
Participatory problem-solving	Collaboration	Co-generated knowledge
	Creating plural structures	Diversity of experiences as opportunity
		Workability as validity

It is interesting how none of the recent conceptions mention the cyclical nature of AR as a fundamental principle. Kock et al. observed that

although most AR projects either claim or imply that this trait is present, respective reports often hide the existence of cycles and the learning process that went on across cyclic iterations. For example, none of the AR projects described in the 1993 special issue on AR of the Human Relations journal (Brown, 1993; Engelstad and Gustavsen, 1993; Greenwood et al., 1993; Ledford and Mohrman, 1993; Levin, 1993) was described as a set of iterations in the AR cycle, even though all of them were described as sets of

somewhat disconnected stages in which, with the exception of Ledford and Mohrman's study, there was no systematic collection of data to support study findings.

(Kock et al., 1997, p.9)

To address this criticism, the cyclical spiral of this specific research project will be addressed within Chapter 4 - Reconnaissance.

Although there are lots of similarities in Table 1, it is evident that Zuber-Skerritt preferred accountability as opposed to Greenwood and Levin's preference for workability. Zuber-Skerritt emphasised that the research must be public, whereas Greenwood and Levin believed that the research must increase the participants' control over their situation. These principles are not mutually exclusive, but they are an example of where the aims can differ between AR practitioners. The following section shall explore how the different interpretations have led to a fragmentation of the types of AR frameworks that exist. It is necessary to understand these various types of AR that exist in order to position the particular methodological framework that will be used to address this research question.

2.2.2. Types of AR

AR has been used in many different contexts, including (but not exclusively) business, health, education and agriculture. Each area has developed unique frameworks, defined by their assorted variables of theoretical approaches, researcher positionality and appropriate research methods for the circumstances. Tripp believed this was because

some people have recognised and conceptualised the cycle without knowledge of the other versions already in existence, and one can name the same cycle and its steps in many different ways. Also people have developed versions customized to particular uses and situations because there are many different ways of using the cycle, and one can perform each of the four activities of the cycle in many different ways. Thus different

kinds of action inquiry tend to use different processes in each step, and have different outcomes that are likely to be reported in different ways to different audiences.

(Tripp, 2015, no pagination)

They have established different titles to reflect these different nuances, including (but not exclusively): Educational Action Research, Pragmatic Action Research, Participatory Evaluation, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Participatory Action Research, Participatory Video, Action Learning, Action Science, Human Inquiry, Developmental Action Inquiry, Cooperative Inquiry, Clinical Inquiry, Appreciative Inquiry, Reflective Practice and Organisational Learning. Greenwood and Levin (2006, p.8) argued that AR has so many variants that others reject the name entirely and use different terms to avoid misunderstanding and distinguish themselves. Action Science, for example, has an emphasis on theory building and testing over problem solving and its central concern is for organisations to learn (Herr and Anderson, 2014, p.15). In contrast, Human Inquiry pays less attention to the organisation and places an emphasis on the individual experiences and engagement (Greenwood and Levin, 2005, p. 211). The nature of the participation also varies between the different contexts. For example, a company may use an AR project to involve employees and give an illusion of *participation* (Levin, 1999, p.26), yet this approach would contradict the fundamental principles of Participatory Action Research, which has much more emphasis on collaboration throughout the cycle (see Section 2.2.3. - Participatory Action Research). However, Coghlan and Brannick (2001, p.14) believed that these different approaches are not mutually exclusive and can be combined and adapted to different research contexts.

As there are no established AR frameworks designed exclusively to explore film production, it was necessary to research each of these variants for their distinctive advantages and disadvantages. Pragmatic Action Research (Greenwood and Levin, 2006, p.133) was an appealing framework because of its dynamic and fluid approach, determined by the specific context in which it is applied. However, it has not been widely explored by different commentators, and so I perceived the fluidity as a potential pitfall due to my relative inexperience. Therefore, I chose

Participatory Action Research as a more structured, established framework that could still be applicable to film production.

2.2.3. Participatory Action Research

Much like AR, Participatory Action Research (PAR) has different interpretations depending on the context. MacIntyre (2008) pointed out:

There is no fixed formula for designing, practicing, and implementing PAR projects. Nor is there one overriding theoretical framework that underpins PAR processes. Rather, there is malleability in how PAR processes are framed and carried out.

(MacIntyre, 2008, p.2)

This assertion is based on the fact that PAR has been used in many projects that span different disciplines. In Latin America alone (where PAR is believed to have been significantly developed), it has been used in Columbia to develop adult literacy, Peru to train local farmers and Chile to address agrarian reform (MacIntyre, 2008, p.1). It has been used for a broad array of projects worldwide; to restructure the shipbuilding industry in Europe, improve water sanitation in Canada and address male-to-female violence in New Mexico.

However, whilst there is no overriding theoretical framework in PAR, there are a significant number of commentators who have assigned a fundamental ethos behind the process. Herr and Anderson (2014, p.35) believed PAR is a particular mode of AR that attempts to liberate participants from limitations imposed by tradition, precedent or habit. Tripp (2015, no pagination) argued that it is an inherently political process, because it is typically engaged in the active inquiry and attempted improvement of a 'system' that usually contains multiple stakeholders. Whilst there are variations of political AR that have the express aim of changing the status quo for a whole social group (in the style of suffragettes), PAR can operate on the basis of a community or organisation and the participants within it. Stringer (1999, p.10) believed that this mode of action research "is always enacted through an explicit set

of social values. In modern, democratic social contexts, it is seen as a process of inquiry that has the following characteristics:

- It is *democratic*, enabling the participation of all people.
- It is *equitable*, acknowledging people's equality of worth.
- It is *liberating*, providing freedom from oppressive, debilitating conditions.
- It is *life enhancing*, enabling the expression of people's full human potential."

'Emancipatory' has been used as a term to assimilate all of these concepts. Emancipation is one of three human interests that Habermas believed underpins social organisation and shape social interactions, and in turn informs the modes of inquiry within the research process (Hadfield, 2012, p.573; Herr and Anderson, 2014, p. 35) Whereas *technical* interest focuses on the human desire to control their environments (using empirical analytic science and instrumental reason), and *practical* interest pursues understanding different interpretations of reality (using hermeneutical/interpretive sciences), *emancipatory* interest is concerned with how to release human potential from seemingly 'natural' constraints using critical reflective/ action sciences (Herr and Anderson, 2014, p.35).

McTaggart (1997, p.28) believed that *authentic participation* is central to this emancipation, whereby participants are engaged in the whole process as opposed to being merely *involved* and at risk of co-option and exploitation. Tandon (1988, p.13) identified several determinants of authentic participation in research:

- People's role in setting the agenda of the inquiry
- People's participation in the data collection and analysis; and
- People's control over the use of the outcomes and the whole process.

According to McTaggart, it is the authentic participation that differentiates PAR from AR, where stages of the cycle may be conducted without the involvement of participants:

We use the term participatory action research to differentiate it from the other kinds of research that typically involve researchers from the academy doing research on people, making the people objects of the research. Research on people can be either empirical-analytic or interpretative, and as Habermas (1972, 1974) has argued, because neither of these approaches to research has an explicit politics, both empirical-analytic and interpretative research express an interest which is not emancipatory.

(McTaggart, 1997, p.29)

Some action researchers reject the 'emancipatory' concept. Rearick and Hartford (1999, p.347) believed the term was confusing as action researchers interpreted it in different ways and there was little connection between the espoused theory and the action taken by practitioners. Hadfield (2012, p.576) believed action researchers were capable of bringing their own ideological emancipatory agenda, and simply swap one ideological constraint for another. MacIntyre (2008, p5) felt it was inappropriate to over-emphasize the similarities and differences of the different strands of PAR because of their use in such different contexts and preferred instead to interpret it broadly as "an approach for exploring processes by which participants engage in collaborative, action-based projects that reflect their knowledge and mobilise their desires". MacIntyre added:

How participant groups move from exploring aspects of their lives, their communities, and their concerns to presenting knowledge of their exploration and analysis to outsiders is unique to the group. That is because no two PAR projects are the same. The activities, methods, participants, objectives, and collection techniques are all particular to the context in which the project takes place.

(MacIntyre, 2008, p.49)

MacIntyre's broader interpretation of PAR is not contradictory to McTaggart's or Stringer's, but suggests that emancipation may be a positive by-product of a participatory process as opposed to the primary aim. It is difficult to imagine how a process that could involve multiple stakeholders with potentially differing agendas can be emancipatory for all. Even in a democratic situation with everyone's

opinion being equally valued, if you found yourself in the minority, you could consider yourself oppressed by political restrictions as opposed to liberated by them. Greenwood and Levin argued:

Consequently, we are suspicious of approaches to AR that seem to privilege the homogeneity of communities or consensus-based decision making, believing that such approaches open up great potentials for co-optation and coercion.

(Greenwood and Levin, 2006, p.10)

Therefore, the emphasis should be for the different voices to be heard and represented in the final output, as opposed to silenced or ignored. This may not be emancipation, but it is democratic. Hadfield (2012, p.578) argued that Habermas' three human interests (technical, practical and emancipatory) are still useful concepts for helping to understand the motivations and 'logics' of the various participants. Whilst this selective use of Habermas could be considered an example of building a rationale to suit the ends, Hadfield (2012, p.584) considered it an example of an action researcher as *bricoleur*, using whatever resources are at hand to deal with the complexity of practice.

Having considered the common AR principles outlined in Section 2.2.1 and using a broader interpretation of PAR as the methodological framework (with little emphasis on emancipation), I believe the essential considerations that the project must fulfill are:

- 1) The process must be situated in a real-world context;
- 2) The process must be collaborative and participatory throughout the cycle;
- 3) The process must be democratic and equitable;
- 4) The process must include practice and reflection;
- 5) Research methods can be mixed but must be suitable for the research question;
- 6) The output must be workable and accountable.

Having explored the principles behind Participatory Action Research, I shall now address the criticisms of AR as a methodological framework, before justifying in

detail why I believe it is a suitable to use in relation to this research question in Section 2.4.

2.3. Criticisms of AR

AR versus Positivism

AR's interpretivist approach towards the social world obviously brings the methodological framework into conflict with positivist approaches. As critics of AR, Kieser & Leiner (2009, p.532) argued that management researchers cannot place organisations under laboratory conditions, and therefore the many variables make for a highly problematic operation. It is difficult to address this criticism, as it is an agreement from both sides that the multiple variables make it difficult to conduct positivist, empirical research in this kind of field. It is a much wider criticism of all interpretivist approaches, and is not unique to AR. However, AR is perhaps more contentious than other anti-positivist approaches as it lacks scientific discipline, due to the typical unplanned and informal structure where most of the study is done with no fixed cycles, research methods or theoretical frameworks. Historically, AR has been preoccupied with the action itself and its influence on the settings in which research is done rather than the development of sound research procedures, techniques and methodologies (Kock et al., 1997, p.7). Argyris and Schön (1989) argued that PAR in particular, with such a focus on being relevant in the real world, is capable of falling short of rigorous analysis.

Whereas Kock et al. (1997, p.9) believed that completing multiple iterations of the cycle would bring AR closer to positivist approval, Greenwood and Levin (2006, p.113) were unapologetically defiant about the process: "...we have never seen a conventional social research project that was not filled with compromises and defects." It is logical to reject demands to bring AR closer to positivism, as positivism already has a methodological process that fulfils its criteria of defining 'truth', and adding more cycles to AR projects is unlikely to fully assuage positivist criticism. Addressing validity, Herr and Anderson (2014, p.62) believed that whilst positivism pursues 'truth value', qualitative research should aspire to 'trustworthiness', that it is credible and 'rings true' to those that provided the data.

It seems reasonable that AR should not be judged by the same quality or ‘validity’ criteria with which we judge positivistic and naturalistic research, but considered in the same way that other interpretivist approaches are (Herr and Anderson, 2014, p.65). Coghlan and Brannick (2001, p.10) believed action research should pose three questions:

- What happened? The relating of a good story.
- How do you make sense of what happened? Rigorous reflection on the story.
- So what? Extrapolate usable knowledge or theory from the reflection.

The problem of participation in AR

Another contention with AR over other interpretivist approaches is the reliance on collaboration and participation to create data and extrapolate meaning from it, which contradicts the principle of a detached, objective observer. As Herr and Anderson (2014, p.62) noted, naturalistic inquiry refers to most qualitative researchers wanting to study a phenomenon in its natural setting without ‘contaminating’ it with their presence. The concern is that AR’s interference with the research environment may bias research findings and prevent replication by other researchers in different settings (Kock et al., 1997, p.8). To address this criticism, PAR requires the researcher to consider their ‘positionality’ in relation to the project, as an *insider/outsider* and reflect on any potential bias.

So while bias and subjectivity are natural and acceptable in action research so long as they are critically examined rather ignored, other mechanisms may need to be put into place to ensure that they do not have a distorting effect on outcomes.

(Herr and Anderson, 2014, p.73)

I shall examine my positionality as a researcher, and the mechanisms that I put in place to address bias in Section 3.1.

Questionable methods

Campbell (2002, p.20) argued that PAR has “all the promise and the problems of postmodernist anthropology, namely a concern to explore diversity without the corresponding attention to methodology.” He gave an example of a Participatory Rural Appraisal project where researchers encouraged participants to use visualization techniques that were not suitable, as they implied a western cultural bias and did not address the skills of the local participants (Campbell, 2002, p.25). Most crucially, Campbell (2002, p.27) argued that researchers should scrutinize methods for their limitations and suitability. I shall address these limitations and suitability of research methods under the subsections of Section 3.3. – Data Collection and Section 3.4. – PAR evaluation.

The resource intensity of AR

Another potential weakness is the time frame required to conduct quality AR projects, which can be lengthy and expensive, which may not be acceptable to the research's sponsor (Kock et al., 1997, p. 8). Addressing PAR specifically, Geraldine Pratt (2007) wrote of the importance of having the necessary time to build the trust, skills and community enthusiasm for collaborative projects. This is a valid criticism, especially as certain types of action can be expensive (such as filmmaking). I shall address the issues of timeframe and resources within Chapter 4 - Reconnaissance.

Who owns the research?

The expensive process and the participatory nature of the research pose a further problem: who *owns* the output? Herr and Anderson (2014, p.94) believed that the ownership is an ongoing and negotiable area as the project develops, albeit with clear agreements in place at the beginning that can get revisited if circumstances change. I shall address this concern under Section 3.8. – Ethical Considerations.

2.4 Why not choose Participatory Video (PV) as a methodology?

It would seem most obvious that an AR project about filmmaking would be best suited to a particular methodology known as Participatory Video (PV). It was considered and subsequently rejected for reasons I shall explain here.

Yang (2016, p.13) believed that PV is a relatively new term that is being used to describe an approach which has been around significantly longer than the term itself. There are various origins that contribute to the field, and much like other areas of AR, the process has different approaches that make it hard to define what constitutes PV (Milne, 2016, p.402). Montero and Moreno Domínguez (2015, p.6) argued that approaches and priorities differ between projects along a continuum whereby the emphasis varies from the process to the product. For example, Participatory Cinema and Participatory Video seem closely aligned in process but differ in their medium of acquisition and consumption, and fundamentally upon what constitutes quality.

One origin is believed to have begun with the work of Don Snowden, who worked with Colin Low from the *Challenge for Change* video project, established by the National Film Board of Canada in 1967. Together they visited the Fogo Islands in Newfoundland and enabled locals to produce films around the issues that affected their community. These were participatory inasmuch as the locals suggested the content and appeared in the films, although they did not operate the equipment themselves (Yang, 2016, p.18). These films are believed to have had a transformative effect when shown to other communities and policy makers, and the method subsequently became known as the Fogo Process (Lunch and Lunch, 2006, pg.11). The purpose was ideologically similar to AR in general; that participants should play a part in their own representation instead of being represented by others.

A further project by the *Challenge for Change* scheme was *VTR St-Jacques* (Henault and Klein, 1969), in which the local community in a poor Montreal neighbourhood were trained with video equipment to make the footage themselves. Participating with the communities in the production of the project was deemed to be an extension of the cinéma vérité movement, in which the filmmaker can participate in front of the camera to highlight the artifice within a film's construction. MacDougall (1985, p.284) argued that this participation was a step beyond observational cinema, whereby the filmmaker was detached from the action as a passive observer.

In the subsequent years as video technology has proliferated and reduced in cost, more and more research projects included it as part of varying approaches to AR, including Participatory Rural Appraisal and Participatory Action Research (Gutberlet, 2008). High et al (2012, p.35) believed that these uses of video in AR are closely linked to PV without being described as such. This contributes to the subsequent confusion around what constitutes PV uniquely. Montero and Moreno Domínguez (2015, p.3) argued that “the landscape of PV is sketchy; in spite of very valuable efforts, generally speaking it lacks clear points of reference, systematic approaches and even in-depth observation and assessment of PV experiences.” This lack of definition was a significant reason for not wishing to pursue PV as a methodological approach. Whilst PAR has some similar methodological problems, at least it has been significantly more written about.

A further reason for not using PV was the ideological attachment to the emancipatory nature of AR discussed earlier. The origins of Fogo and the National Film Board of Canada are clearly rooted in the representation and empowerment of marginalised communities. Some subsequent definitions suggest that PV has an emancipatory purpose at its core. Milne (2016, p.402) believed that in an academic context, PV “should be critically reflexive, grounded in feminist/emancipatory epistemologies, participatory participation and, if the participants so wish, be used as a means to advocate for social change.” Lunch and Lunch (2006, p.10) argued that “PV can be a highly effective tool to engage and mobilise marginalised people and to help them implement their own forms of sustainable development based on local needs.” Foregrounding emancipation was not a particular research objective, so PV seemed inappropriate in this context.

High et al (2012, p.43) identified an example that focused on the process of making a film *with* people as opposed to *about* people. This process was not emancipatory and involved a writer developing a script by himself and then involving non-professionals in his village with the production of the movie. This could be perceived to be close to the project that we subsequently produced. However, High et al acknowledged that it was not conceived as a PV project and questioned whether it is therefore sensible to see as such at all. They believed that it was an

example of community production that strengthened and facilitated connections, which could be considered a goal of PV. They argued:

it is a mistake to treat participatory video as though it is unitary; as a single methodology, approach or movement. But if we were pressed to characterise it, we would do so in terms of practice of bricolage, something that arises emergently from the openness to difference and innovation displayed by the pioneers in the field.

(High et al, 2012, p.45)

Perhaps it is possible to regard the methodology to simultaneously be PV and PAR under the notion of bricolage and considering the significant overlap elsewhere in the field. However, as academics are trying to define and establish the identity of PV, I believe it is crucial to acknowledge that this project was not conceived with the intention of being a PV project, and any overlap is coincidental.

Finally, with these criticisms in mind, I shall present why I believe PAR is suitable for examining low and micro-budget film production.

2.5. Why choose PAR to examine film production?

Firstly, I am empowered by the widespread belief that the structure of AR theses can vary dependent on the topic and can be organised however the researcher deems suitable (Davies, 2004; Herr and Anderson, 2014, p.126; Stringer, 1999, p.168). I believe this is useful considering the challenges of a PAR methodology. Whilst PAR is a contentious methodological framework, it is nevertheless an established one. Whilst other variants of AR could be considered obscure, PAR has been extensively critically evaluated. The fact that it has been so widely criticised (and defended) has informed my decision to use PAR as a methodological framework over other approaches.

Despite a significant search, I can find no existing examples of PAR being used to explore film production. Whilst digital video has been used as a medium for

participation in projects as varied as recycling in Brazil (Gutberlet, 2008) and promoting health amongst youth in Canada (Flicker et al., 2008), no projects have focused on filmmaking itself. This may be because film production, as an ‘entertainment industry’, is not perceived to be a socially marginalised or repressed workforce that needs liberating or emancipation. It may also be because of the project-based nature of film production, as Davenport pointed out:

Whereas much academic literature asserts that project-based working facilitates innovation and flexibility, this does not appear to be the case in the UK film industry. Although film companies achieve numerical flexibility and manufacturing efficiency, the production model is based on a system of organization that has scarcely changed in decades. Arguably, this is because producers strive for ‘repeatable solutions’ rather than rupture’ or ‘originality.’

(Davenport, 1996, p.256)

‘Repeatable solutions’ are a response to money, a factor that may also influence the lack of PAR in film production. In an industrial context, as de Vany (2004, p.267) noted, most of the money has to be spent up front to produce a movie before anyone actually knows how much it is worth, making it difficult to experiment with the production model when so much financial capital is at risk. However, I believe the financial pressure can be overcome, and the absence of previous PAR projects in film production is part of the originality of this thesis.

Shirky (2008, p.247) agreed that financial restrictions limit the ability for organisations to research better strategies within the vast array of possibilities to explore, hence the reliance on repeatable solutions. Whilst film production has been explored at length through a variety of academic disciplines using different theoretical and methodological frameworks, many of these studies have taken ‘objective’ perspectives of film practice from disciplines outside of film practice, and have arguably not provided any workable solutions to the problems that they identify (e.g., gender imbalance, long working hours, lack of visible progression opportunities). Eliashberg et al. (2005, p.658) argued:

The digital age has just begun, and its ultimate effects on film production, theatrical distribution, and exhibition, and nontheatrical media such as television, video, the Internet, and mobile devices remain largely unknown. It therefore seems wise to take a broad research perspective on the motion picture industry.

(Eliashberg et al., 2005, p.658)

I believe that researching film production through the act of producing a film contributes to the broad research perspective and may contribute a different understanding than the industry-focused one that the UKFC provided.

I also believe another benefit of PAR is that the participatory nature allows for a plurality of voices to be heard from across the cast and crew, as opposed to just the director, producer or writer. Most crucially, I believe PAR offers an opportunity to experiment in film *through* practice with other practitioners, instead of simply observing practice.

In the next chapter I shall detail the application of this methodological framework.

3. Applying Participatory Action Research

Whilst the previous chapter established Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the methodological approach for this thesis, this chapter will determine how the PAR approach was applied in relation to the research question. This methodology will firstly focus on how the PAR cycle was conducted. Secondly, I will specifically address the subsequent evaluation of the PAR process in relation to the research question.

In the previous chapter, it was established that the PAR process must:

- 1) be situated in a real-world context;
- 2) be collaborative and participatory throughout the cycle;
- 3) be democratic and equitable;
- 4) include practice and reflection;
- 5) involve research methods suitable for the research question;
- 6) have a workable and accountable output.

Chapter 4 -Reconnaissance will go into specific detail about the situational ‘real world’ context of the project, but before I can go into the how the participation and the research were applied, I need to establish the details regarding the nature of the ‘action’.

In order to answer the research question, I needed to produce a film (using PAR) whilst still fulfilling the same criteria that the UKFC based their data set on; otherwise it would not be a fair comparison. The UKFC’s (2008, p.9) criteria of a low or micro-budget film were:

- £1 million or under cash budget with no lower limit.
- Feature film (i.e. excluding short films and television programmes).
- A minimum of 60 minutes running time.
- Any genre including feature documentary.
- Any recording medium (e.g., film, digibeta, etc.).
- Intended for theatrical exhibition (regardless of outcome).
- Year of completion 2002 or later (up to January 2007 start of principal photography).
- Intended to qualify as British under the 1985 Films Act.

It would be impossible to complete a film within the penultimate criteria of being produced within 2002 to 2007, but the process of producing a film within the remaining criteria constitutes the ‘action’ for this thesis. This particular filming process took place as part of the Melbourne International Film Festival in Australia, in July and August 2010. Despite filming in Australia, the film project (a romantic comedy called *The Ballad of Des & Mo*) still qualifies as a British film with 24 out of a possible 35 points on the British Cultural Test¹ (the pass mark is 18 points). This is due to many of the key cast and crew being British or EU nationals.

The process of shooting and editing a ‘regular’ feature film (more than 60 minutes) took place in 72 consecutive hours. Aside from the cost benefit of shooting quickly, this rapid production theoretically increased the democratic and participatory nature of the research, as I was not able to be in all places at once within the production. The term ‘regular’ refers to the fact that the film narrative itself did not resort to any production trickery (e.g., one continuous take or slow motion) in order to meet the UKFC’s criteria. It had standard shots, cuts and scenes, and should be indistinguishable from any other ‘regular’ film. Filming a low or micro-budget film production of this kind would usually take much longer, as the UKFC (2008, p.18) noted:

Shooting most commonly took between 21 and 30 days (39% of films surveyed). 31% of films were shooting for between 11 and 20 days, and 6% for 10 days or fewer. For most films, the average shoot day was at least 10 hours long (10-11 hours for 34% of films, and 12 hours or more for 33%). For 23%, the average shoot day was 8-9 hours long, and for 10%, it was less than eight hours.

The rapid speed of production in 72 hours is made exclusively possible by tapeless technology, whereby data recorded on cameras can be transferred to edit suites faster than real time. However, shooting at this speed removes scope for

¹ <http://www.bfi.org.uk/supporting-uk-film/british-certification-tax-relief/cultural-test-film> (last accessed 17th July 2016)

contingency within the production, and increased the risk of not actually completing the film, which could ultimately result in a failure to fulfil the UKFC's criteria of a low or micro-budget production. However, this is not unique to AR projects:

Coping with uncertainty in a patient and secure way is one of the action researcher's most important traits. Complex projects with diverse stakeholders in highly charged situations do not yield quick fixes or magic bullets. At many points in an AR project, it will not be clear where the project is going, if it is going anywhere, or if it is going to succeed in anyway. The action researcher must not only be able to tolerate this uncertainty but be able to help the local stakeholders withstand this uncertainty and the sense of risk or demoralization that often accompanies it.

(Greenwood and Levin, 2006, p.128)

This potential for failure was particularly difficult in relation to funding the film and research. This will be addressed in Section 3.8. – Ethical Considerations. However, I will first address how this filmmaking action can be considered 'participatory' and 'researched'.

3.1. Positionality – Inside/Out

Positionality refers to the researcher's relationship to the action research, as unlike positivist or some interpretivist approaches, the researcher is not detached from the participants in an attempt to achieve objectivity. This positionality is often defined as an inside/out continuum (see Table 2), whereby the researcher articulates how close or distant they are when participating in the action with practitioners. Herr and Anderson believed:

Much action research is centrally concerned with these issues of the relationship between outsiders and insiders, since clarity about them is necessary for thinking through issues of research validity or trustworthiness, as well as research ethics.

(Herr and Anderson, 2014, p.37)

Table 2 Continuum and Implications of Positionality (Herr and Anderson, 2014, p.40)

Positionality of researcher					
Insider					Outsider
Insider (researching own self/practice)	Insider in collaboration with outsiders	Insider(s) in collaboration with outsiders	Reciprocal collaboration (insider-outsider teams)	Outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s)	Outsider(s) studies Insider(s)
Contributes to:					
Knowledge base, Improved/critiqued practice, Self/professional transformation	Knowledge base, Improved/critiqued practice, Professional/ organisational transformation	Knowledge base, Improved/critiqued practice, Professional/ organisational transformation	Knowledge base, Improved/critiqued practice, Professional/ organisational transformation	Knowledge base, Improved/critiqued practice, Organisational development/ transformation	Knowledge base
Traditions:					
Practitioner research, Autobiography, Narrative research, self-study	Feminist consciousness raising groups, Inquiry/Study groups, Teams	Inquiry/ Study groups	Collaborative forms of participatory action research that achieve equitable power relations	Mainstream change agency: consultancies, industrial democracy, organisational learning; Radical change: community empowerment	University- based. Academic research on action research methods or action research topics.

Having established in the previous chapter that the cost and risk within filmmaking would make it prohibitive for me to join an existing film production as an outsider, I needed to establish a new project in order to conduct participatory research. This placed me as a practitioner at the centre of a new production, an *insider*, and not where I had envisioned I would be on the continuum, especially with a PAR project. Traditionally within PAR, a researcher would be considered an *outsider* who joins an existing collection of practitioners (insiders) in order to conduct research with *everyone* participating. Would being an *insider* mean I could not conduct a PAR project? Herr and Anderson (2014, p.59) argued

that knowledge production from all positions is valid as long as one is honest and reflective about the limitations of one's multiple positionalities and takes them into account methodologically.

'One's multiple positionalities' refers to the notion that positionality can change within an AR cycle, or not be easily defined to begin with (Herr and Anderson, 2014, p.39). For example, as a practitioner, I am an *insider*, but as an academic working with others making a living in film, I am an *outsider*. In a filmmaking

context, producers are often an *insider* to their own project, but an *outsider* to the community in which the film is taking place and the crew is being hired from. For example, if a producer or director came from Hollywood to produce a film in Pinewood, they would be considered an *outsider* in relation to the British Cultural Test and 1985 Films Act, and in order to activate tax breaks, they would need to recruit a local crew. From a different perspective, they are all *inside* industry, if you consider it their primary source of income. However, this selective interpretation of inside/outside positionality is fraught with epistemological and methodological problems. Herr and Anderson (2014, p.42) believed that *insiders* masquerading as *outsiders* (in an attempt to appear objective) conduct some of the worst action research. Hall (1996, p.39) argued that it is critical to acknowledge the experiences and prior knowledge that is brought to bear on the data collection, interpretation and analysis. The fact that the researcher participates at all can be considered a contamination of the research findings, so it is necessary for the researcher to reflect honestly on their involvement in order to give the research validity and trustworthiness. I therefore believed that it was reasonable for me to work within a PAR framework as long as I acknowledged the methodological limitations of my insider involvement, sought to mitigate such involvement wherever possible, and embrace it in the places that mitigation was not possible. I will expand on the specific methodological measures that I have taken to mitigate and address my positionality in Section 3.3. – Data Collection and Section 3.4. – PAR evaluation and will further examine my positionality in relation to the project with Chapter 4 – Reconnaissance.

It is worth noting that Northern Alliance, the company that the UKFC commissioned to write the report on Low and Micro-Budget Film Production, were specifically *media* consultants (UKFC, 2008, p.62). There was not a statement regarding their positionality within their report, or whether their status could colour their judgement at all.

3.2. Reconnaissance

Dillion (2008) and Hill (2008) argued that amongst all of the literature on AR, the process of reconnaissance is the most poorly defined and in need of scaffolding. Hill (2008, p.19) cited Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), who used ‘reconnaissance’ to describe a process of reflection in order to identify thematic concerns, established at the beginning or pre-beginning stages of an action research process and situated before the first AR cycle. Strangely, it is not considered part of the cycle itself, presumably because it is only necessary for the first cycle and redundant thereafter. Tripp (2015, no pagination) agreed with this one-off position at the beginning of the first cycle but suggested that the phase be used to conduct a situational analysis and then plan how to monitor and evaluate the AR process. Dillon (2008, p.11) argued that as well as this situational analysis, there should be a ‘self-reconnaissance’, exploring the investigator’s beliefs and behaviours in an attempt to add rigour to the thesis. This process is “to surface the unconscious values that underpin all practice and all investigative practice” (Hill, 2008, p.27). Neither Dillon (2008) or Hill (2008) can determine how far back one must go to uncover the personal baggage that may have an impact “both on the observation of a catalyst situation and on the determination of an appropriate intervention” (Hill, 2008, p.21). McTaggart (1996, p. 252) was sceptical of this attempt to examine one’s ‘self’ believing that the search for ideological purity could ultimately prevent or paralyse *action*. It seems logical and necessary to examine myself in order to contextualise or mitigate against any bias that may affect the results or interpretation of the data collection, but wherever possible I believe this should be addressed by selecting appropriate research methods in the first instance.

Stringer (1999) did not explicitly use the word ‘reconnaissance’, although was prescriptive about the process of ‘setting the stage’ or ‘looking at the lay of the land’. There is a need to establish the key stakeholders and define their relationships to one another, including how contact was made and the roles negotiated (Stringer, 1999, p.63). This is particularly important within the context of a film production where I was not drawing on a pre-existing, established crew, but actually building one from scratch. A problematic consideration that I had not envisaged when choosing PAR was that most previous examples are within relatively established contexts (e.g., companies, school classes, community groups). Film productions do not have a fixed number of participants from the beginning through to the end; it

fluctuates dependent on the stage in the process. For example, at the beginning we were two producers, but at the height of the production we were approximately seventy people. At what point has the action research cycle started? How are *participants* defined? There are also implications surrounding who got picked to do which roles, and how the selection process worked. I will address these issues and explore this process in detail within Chapter 4 – Reconnaissance. These challenges would also have implications for the PAR evaluation stage in particular, which will be addressed in Section 3.4. – PAR evaluation.

3.3. Data collection

Having established that my positionality potentially impacts on the validity or credibility of the research, I shall now present the various methods I used to collect data, in order to demonstrate how bias could be mitigated. Winter (1996, p.15) presented a broad range of potential data collection methods that are suitable for AR including:

- Keeping a detailed diary of subjective impressions, descriptions of meetings attended and lessons learned;
- Collection of documents relating to a situation;
- Observation notes of meetings, perhaps using previously prepared checklists, frequency schedules, etc.;
- Questionnaire surveys, using open or closed formats;
- Interviews with colleagues or others, which allow the many subtle nuances of an unfamiliar perspective to be explored in detail and clarified;
- Tape recording or video recording of interviews or meetings, in order to provide an objective record that can be listened to repeatedly or transcribed, so that patterns of interaction that could go unnoticed are noted and analysed.
- Written descriptions of meetings or interviews which are provided to the other people involved, in order for them to validate or amend such records;

By collecting and comparing a variety of the above methods on the production, I intended to later triangulate between different data sources in order to transcend their individual limitations. This process of data triangulation is unusual for PAR, where the narratives are encouraged to coexist as opposed to creating one singular narrative. I will address this decision in Section 3.5. – Discussion.

3.3.1. Personal accounts

As the rationale explored, the shortcomings of the existing film production model are subjective and dependent on your position within the film process, (i.e. there cannot be a definitive tool for analysing the film's model without taking a fixed theoretical position, such as the role of the 'producer'). A producer, who may have scalable exposure to the monetary profit of the production, may be interested in filming quickly to reduce costs whereas a technician, who earns one day's pay for one day's work, may like to take their time to earn more money. Therefore, a producer's perspective most likely looks different from a technician's perspective, yet both would be valid. A contemporary film crew has these mixed set of agendas, sometimes contradictory, that need to be balanced on set. For as long as all these different types of crew would have to work together on set, they have to compromise and negotiate their roles in practice. It therefore seems sensible to develop multiple research methods that could encompass the pragmatic totality from the outset and assume that there are contradictions within all film productions, as opposed to only interviewing people in roles deemed by the UKFC to be significant (e.g. producers, directors and writers). In order to represent these diverse voices, I collected personal accounts using two different methods:

- A documentary and photo collection
- Blogs and vlogs.

3.3.1.1. The documentary and photo collection

The use of video and photographs for data collection are considered valid as they help to provide a powerful record of events and activities (Stringer, 1999, p.72; Flick, 2004, p.179). Therefore, Gary Hootor and I felt we should produce a

documentary and a collection of photographs following our process. I believed that if my own positionality could be considered compromised as an *insider*, I would mitigate my own involvement through investigator triangulation, commissioning different *outsiders* to document ‘behind the scenes’ of the film production. This was a variation of ‘quasi-experimental data’ whereby researchers generate data by giving a video camera to a group of people and then observing how they use it (Silverman, 2014, p.357). Although we were fairly certain that the filmmakers and photographers were able to produce meaningful data on a medium that they had experience with, it was experimental inasmuch as we did not direct them. However, the positional situation cannot be described as simply as *insider/outsider* in this circumstance, as there were complexities surrounding their relationship to me, the location, the project and the research which need further context, which I shall address in Chapter 4 – Reconnaissance.

The documentary filmmakers and photographers were allowed to ‘access all areas’ of the production and had permission to observe the process, and in the documentarians’ case, interview participants by mutual consent (see Section 3.8 Ethical Considerations). The documentary would not be funded out of our own budget but would provide an opportunity for other micro-budget filmmakers to have a platform for their work to be seen, as we would share audiences. The plan was for the two films (the drama film that we shot and edited in 72 hours, and their documentary following the process) to be submitted into film festivals together.

The photographers shared the images that they were taking throughout the process through social media, helping to connect the participants with a wider community. The photos would also be used in the subsequent individual evaluation process to help triangulate when examining different perspectives from the production. This will be addressed in Section 3.5. – Discussion.

3.3.1.2. Blogs and vlogs

I would record my own observations and experiences through a blog and vlog (sharing writing and videos respectively online) about my perspective. The blogs

and vlogs were published via social media. There were many benefits of sharing these publicly in relation to PAR:

- It made us accountable.
- It gave the opportunity for people to join in and participate in the dialogue.
- It promoted the project to a wider audience.
- It gave the impression of transparency.

Obviously, ‘giving the impression’ of transparency is not the same as transparency itself. However, there were certain ethical considerations, such as companies who loaned kit but did not want it advertised, and generally keeping a positive spin on situations that could negatively influence the production of the film. The latter is undoubtedly propaganda and should not be considered reliable evidence. However, that is not to dismiss all of the blogs or vlogs as propaganda, and triangulation would be key to interpreting and evaluating the posts. Some of the blogs were ‘guest posts’ on the websites of other notable bloggers, such as Ted Hope, Chris Jones or Randy Finch. These posts would serve three purposes:

- They would introduce and promote our project to different audiences.
- They would add credibility to the research (as they were endorsed by other industry *insiders*).
- They would increase participation.

3.3.2. Other significant artefacts

Stringer (1999, p.73) believed that organisations are prolific with documents that can help in a research context. Whilst many documents are produced during film productions (e.g., call sheets/ script breakdowns), not many would be particularly valuable in relation to this research question. However, McNiff et al (2003, p.105) encouraged action researchers to be imaginative when considering what data could yield good evidence. I believe there were other significant artefacts from the process to evaluate, such as articles or interviews in broadcast media.

Furthermore, although the film would be the centrepiece of the action within my research, I was not sure what purpose it would have as evidence itself. However, as *The Ballad of Des & Mo* would need to qualify as a film under the UKFC’s criteria

of a low and micro-budget production, I included it within the data collection in order for it to be evaluated once made.

3.4. PAR evaluation

It is important to distinguish the difference between the evaluation that takes place within the PAR process itself (which was participatory) and the subsequent discussion of the PAR process (which, in the case of this thesis, is individual). The initial part of this section will focus on the how the evaluation worked within the PAR process, whilst Section 3.5. - Discussion will specifically address how the PAR process was evaluated in relation to the research question.

When viewed in relation to the AR cycle, the data collection and evaluation can be assigned to different parts of the process; *observe* then *reflect* respectively. Most of the literature surrounding AR is vague about the exact process of evaluating within the AR cycle. Greenwood and Levin (2006, p.185) believed that

If evaluation is to focus on the things that matter to the funded stakeholders, then the only way to conduct it is to examine the internal dynamics, processes and outcomes as understood and judged from inside the program or activity. The local stakeholders must be fully involved in the evaluation. As everyone knows, engaging the local stakeholders in this way is exceedingly rare. Whether or not there is this kind of participant involvement is the fracture line between participatory evaluation (PE) and conventional positivistic evaluation.

This is where I encountered a further complication with the PAR methodology. PAR typically addresses problems contained within a situation in an attempt to make it more equitable. The evaluation is therefore simple – has it worked? Is the process more equal and can we work this way? The *containment* is key. The participants are usually present throughout within the class or workplace and the solution is comparable to the situation before the research. However, with the disjointed structure that the freelance film production model creates, it is difficult

to collectively agree on a workable solution to any inequity that exists when the participants congregate and disband so often and in different combinations. Therefore, instead of searching for a 'workable solution', we would simply search for people's reactions and responses to the process of making a micro-budget feature film. These responses would potentially inform further planning in a new action research cycle with participants, but also provide a point at which I could individually address the research question of whether an alternative methodology can present a different perspective than the UKFC's report.

The transient, uncertain structure of film productions meant that the participatory evaluation was quite a fragmented process, stretching over months and varying in the number of participants available at each stage. The process involved an accumulation of all the data collected over the film production, and reflecting on it at different opportunities, sometimes online, sometimes in person. There was little collective attempt to extract further interpretations from the existing data in order to build one narrative until this individual thesis. This will be addressed in Section 3.5- Discussion. Ultimately, the outputs of the participatory evaluation were:

- Participant SWOT analyses
- The documentary
- Other significant artefacts

These would provide accounts from across the production and could help verify the experiences on a micro-budget production. I will now go into each evaluation element in more detail.

3.4.1. Participant SWOT analyses

The primary way of exploring a different perspective of low and micro-budget film production was to ask participants to conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats) analysis of their experience of the process from their own perspective, making it possible to gauge and reflect the many contradictions and subjective experiences on set. This was the only real opportunity to engage the largest number of participants in evaluation before the production disbanded,

“taking advantage of the multiple perspectives of the diverse stakeholders and their experiences with the problems” (Greenwood and Levin, 2006, p.261).

As this was to be the main evaluative process, I will expand on why I felt it was a suitable method to select. I believed SWOT addressed Campbell’s (2002) concern of inappropriate methods that do not meet the skills of the local participants. Helms and Nixon (2010, p.231) believed the apparent popularity of SWOT is due to its simplicity, and I was not aware of any crewmembers that had not encountered it at some point before in their experience (although this was an assumption and I did not check).

As Balamuralikrishna and Dugger (1995, p.40) argued, SWOT is a dynamic process for decision-making and helps ‘mindmap’ future possibilities through a systematic approach considering both positive and negative concerns, and can be a prompt tool to help explore new possibilities. I therefore believed it would be particularly useful within the reflective, participatory evaluative part of the AR cycle.

Chermack and Kasshanna (2007, p.388) believed there are six steps to successful SWOT analysis. The first step is to define an explicit objective (in this case ‘to reflect on the experience of making the film’). The second step follows by providing an explanation to SWOT analysis participants of the procedure. The third step is the most popularly known: participants individually offer their opinion of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to the process. Once individual contributions have been obtained, the fourth stage is to aggregate the responses into one larger picture containing all of the perspectives on the model’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The fifth stage is a process where the strengths can be viewed as weaknesses and opportunities can simultaneously contain threats. This gives new insights into choosing appropriate strategies and promotes innovative ways of thinking about known issues in new ways. The sixth step is the development of specific actions for moving forward. I would attempt to conduct all stages with participants in a special session arranged at the end of the production period.

There are alternatives to SWOT that could be considered more robust, such as Telescopic Observations framework (Helms & Nixon, 2010, p. 231) or the Goals Grid (Nickols and Ledgerwood, 2006). However, these are not so widely known as SWOT, and therefore I considered them to be inappropriate for the participants, as it would require more explanation and could hamper their involvement or deter people from taking part.

SWOT is not without critics. Valentin (2001, p.55) argued the guidelines for using SWOT consist largely of catchall questions devoid of theoretical underpinnings. Thus, the analysis often produces shallow, misleading results. SWOT analysis remains atheoretic without the necessary theoretical support to validate findings, partly due to SWOT analysis being a 'snapshot' of a point in time. Pickton and Wright (1998, p.105) argued it produces a superficial listing output that makes it dangerously simplistic in its structure. Hill and Westbrook (1997, p.50) agreed that SWOT is simply an indiscriminate list. While SWOT is useful to profile and enumerate issues, it does not provide actual strategies to implement to take advantage of opportunities while leveraging strengths. The simple list of words or bullet points without more detail may be difficult to interpret. The simple format of the SWOT tool may be an oversimplification of a business situation that is more complex. A culmination of these weaknesses leads to one further weakness: SWOT analysis can be misused to defend a previously decided course of action (Chermack and Kasshanna, 2007, p.392). Therefore, the criticisms of SWOT can be summarized as such:

- The tautology of responses can be perceived in the different categories simultaneously,
- it is atheoretical and is not conducted uniformly as a form of analysis,
- it generates a list of variables that are not prioritised,
- it does not generate solutions to the issues that it uncovers,
- it can be used to defend an existing course of action.

It is important to address these problems of SWOT in order to justify the validity of its use as an analytical tool in this study.

The tautology of responses can be perceived in the different categories simultaneously

Helms and Nixon (2010, p.240) believed that the awareness of the factors is often more important than their classification (opportunities not taken, for example, can become threats), and the focus should be on development of a strategic plan from SWOT analysis. They believed that SWOT analysis should be linked with other primary and secondary research methods to subject the findings to additional 'due diligence', ensuring the information and the interpretation of the SWOT evidence is clear and appropriate. The fact that some responses could be considered threats and opportunities simultaneously is one of the reasons for choosing SWOT. Instead of being considered overly simplistic, it helps reflect the complexity on a film set where differing roles may perceive the same situation completely differently. A technician that is being asked to do the same job 'faster' as a result of digital technology will no doubt worry about the loss of pay that comes from spending a shorter time on set, whereas a producer will see that as a cost saving. One person's threat is the other's opportunity, co-existing on the same project.

SWOT is atheoretical and is not conducted uniformly as a form of analysis

I believed that SWOT being atheoretical was actually a benefit in this particular instance, as I felt that adopting one theoretical position could potentially alienate those who do not identify with the theory, and therefore limit the project's potential to reflect the different opinions of the crew. Whether or not SWOT is carried out uniformly between organisations was less of a concern in this instance, as long as it was carried out uniformly on this project.

SWOT generates a list of variables that are not prioritised

It is possible to prioritise the outcomes from SWOT, either by asking the individual to list them in importance under each header or by accumulating responses from individuals and prioritising them in the order of most popular once collected. However, this assumes that the most popular priority is the actual priority, which is not necessarily the case. For example, in a company structure the usual priority is the profit motive for shareholders (which is the modus operandi of the company), regardless of what the numerous employees think. On a film set there may be

multiple, intertwined variables that would differ from film to film, with priorities changing from film to film, and therefore prioritizing them in this project would limit the universality of the project. For this reason, there was arguably no need to do more than raise awareness of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in this project, without prioritising them.

SWOT does not generate solutions to the issues that it uncovers

In-keeping with the other perceived limitations of SWOT, it would be difficult to generate solutions without a theoretical underpinning and/or a prioritising mechanism. As opposed to this being seen as a reflection of SWOT's simplicity, it could be argued that this is a reflection of its ability to handle complexity, such as the film production process. It could be argued that it would not be necessary for SWOT to generate solutions to the issues that it uncovers, as long as it helps to answer the question of whether there were issues that were not in the UKFC's original report.

SWOT can be used to defend an existing course of action.

The decision to get the crew to create independent SWOT analyses after the process followed the same logic that Birley and Moreland (1998, p.51) used for focus groups; they have an advantage over semi-structured interviews as the group is less likely to be 'led' by the interviewer and data can be collected from a larger pool of respondents in a shorter space of time. This process therefore reduces the chance of being 'led' at the data collection stage.

The process for the participant SWOT analyses was intended to be straightforward. I planned to meet with the participants after the screening and before our wrap party event. This was an ideal point as the production was finished but the crew were still together. I planned to go through the six stages outlined above in approximately 90 minutes. However, in reality, once the screening finished the participants dispersed in all directions for food with their families and friends before the wrap party, which was frustrating. I decided to postpone the participatory evaluation and attempt it during the wrap party when I knew everyone would be reconvening together.

In retrospect, it was unsurprising that conducting it at the wrap party was not going to be easy. For a start, it would be difficult to spend 90 minutes meaningfully going through the process. Therefore, I made an announcement during the wrap party, and provided pens and printed empty SWOT sheets for crew members to anonymously record their opinions and place them within shoebox acting as a ballot box. The sheets were not collected until the end of the night and then examined by the core crew in the days that followed once the majority of participants had disbanded. This was annoying, as I was only conducting the first three stages of the SWOT process with everyone present and we could not conduct the further reflection together in the wrap party environment. Whilst I do not believe that it posed an insurmountable problem to the research project due to triangulation, this was my single greatest regret of the research process and had ramifications for the data collected, which will be addressed in Section 5.1. – Participant SWOT analysis.

3.4.2. The documentary

It would take much longer for the documentary filmmakers to edit their film from all of their footage, and it would not be feasible to keep all the participants together for this process, so they would present their edited, synthesised account of the process much later. Whilst this gave the documentary filmmakers significant control over the presentation of their perspective, contributors would be entitled to have the power of consultation on the penultimate draft of the film (which was sent via internet) to address their concerns. No one would be afforded the power of veto.

This process of editing was in itself a process of evaluation, as the documentarians were forced to reflect on their observations and make sense of them.

3.4.3. Other significant artefacts

There were further opportunities for some participants to reflect through broadcast media, such as a radio interview and a television appearance, as well as a podcast recording from a not-for-profit film seminar, which included some of the cast and crew.

These collected participatory reflections (SWOT, the documentary and other significant artefacts), would be triangulated amongst themselves and in relation to other data collected (photos, blogs and vlogs) to establish my own individual ‘comprehensive picture’ of low and micro-budget filmmaking, to be developed within the discussion chapter of this thesis.

3.5. Discussion

Usually within PAR projects, the evaluative process is conducted within the AR cycle with all participants, and any subsequent written report then presents the narratives or outcomes that emerged from the process and contextualises those narratives with the wider literature. However, in this case, there were problems with adopting the above approach.

Firstly, the stages of the AR cycle were not so clean-cut or distinguishable. This is partly due to the edit of the documentary taking a year to appear, but also because multiple bifurcations emerged on the AR cycles with different participants, all of which were equally time-consuming, and the tangents were not directly linked to the original research question. This divergence will be addressed in more detail with Chapter 6 – Discussion.

Secondly, I was concerned that I may not be making a significant *individual* contribution to the thesis. In retrospect, I regret this lack of confidence, and the subsequent problems that this created for the PAR methodology. However, I was empowered by the widespread belief that the structure of an AR thesis can vary dependent on the topic and can be organised however the researcher deems suitable (Davies, 2004; Herr and Anderson, 2014, p.126; Stringer, 1999, p.168).

As the AR cycle was leading the participants in various different directions, I decided that the discussion for this thesis should return to the original research question: would a different methodology present a perspective of low and micro-budget film production that differs from the ‘comprehensive picture’ that the UKFC

claimed to portray? In order to address this question, I decided to conduct an individual meta-evaluation of the original participant evaluation outputs from Melbourne. This meta-evaluation was not conducted as part of any of the subsequent AR cycles and became an individual endeavour, written retrospectively and solely as a contribution to this thesis.

I conducted this meta-evaluation by taking a grounded theory approach to the data analysis. This was more suitable for the research question than content analysis, which would require a set of a priori themes and then noting the number of instances that fall into each category (Silverman, 2014, p.116). I wanted to look through the participatory evaluative outputs and establish ways in which they were different from the UKFC report as opposed to looking for examples of predetermined value. I was encouraged by Glaser and Strauss's (1967, p.39) assertion that "generating hypotheses requires enough evidence only to establish a suggestion- not an excessive piling up of evidence to establish a proof, and the consequent hindering of the generation of new hypotheses". As Böhm (2004, p.274) noted, this process of distancing myself from existing theories and looking for more to grow from my data set appeared liberating initially, but it caused a great deal of insecurity. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.30) argued "accurate evidence is not so crucial for generating theory, the kind of evidence, as well as the number of cases, is also not so crucial. A single case can indicate a general conceptual category or property: a few more cases can confirm the indication". However, I quickly began to adopt more rigid frameworks and methodological approaches in the fear that my methodology was more flawed than the UKFC had originally been.

To begin with, I compared and mapped two frameworks to assist my analysis of the visual data; Denzin's (2004, p.241) *Principles of Critical Visual Research* and a similar framework developed by Silverman (2014, p.370) (see Table 3). I began by watching and looking through the visual artefacts and then largely followed Denzin's approach and factored in Silverman's recommendations at the relevant points. Denzin (2004, p.240) argued that no visual text evokes the same meaning in all viewers; therefore, I would not assume realism to be the default position of the texts and would search for subversive interpretations of the texts as well as realist

ones. Denzin (2004, p.240) believed that “a realist reading of a visual document has four characteristics:

- It treats a visual text as a realistic, truthful depiction of some phenomenon. Realist readings assume that pictures are windows to the real world.
- A text is viewed as establishing truth claims about the world and the events that go on in it. That is, it tells the truth.
- The meaning of a photo-visual text can be given through a close reading of its contents, its attention to detail, its depiction of characters, and its dialogue.
- These readings will validate the truth claims the film or text makes about reality. A traditional realist reading attempts to discover how visual texts speak to the ‘universal’ features of the human condition.”

A subversive reading challenges realist interpretations; implying that the realism in visual material is always filtered through positive or negative preconceptions and biases of the maker and viewer (Denzin, 2004, p.240). I believed this was manageable as I had experience of these approaches from my postgraduate research in film studies at University College Dublin.

Table 3 Comparison of Video Analysis Approaches

Denzin's <i>Principles of Critical Visual Analysis</i>	Silverman's <i>How to do video analysis</i>
Phase 1: Looking and feeling Observe the documents as a totality/ Look and listen to the materials. Let them talk to you. Feel their effects on you. Record these feelings and impressions/ Write down questions that occur to you. Note patterns of meaning.	1. Catalogue your data. (e.g., list the contents of each recording)
Phase 2: What Question are you asking? State your research question/ What questions does the text claim to answer?/ How does it represent and define key cultural values?/ Inventory the evidence, note key scenes, and images.	
Phase 3: Structured microanalysis Do a scene-by-scene, microanalysis, transcribe discourse, describe scenes, take quotes from the text/ Form and find patterns and sequences/ Write detailed descriptions/ How does the text present objective reality, handle facts, represent experience and dramatize truth?/ Keep a focus on the research question/ Identify major moments in the film/text when conflicts over values occur/ Detail how the film/text/image/takes a position on these values.	2. Find an activity that occurs several times in your data. 3. Select one data fragment to see in detail how this activity is carried out. 4. Transcribe this fragment in detail. 5. Examine the organization of this activity and the sequence of actions which precede and follow it and how the participants attend to what precedes and follows it.
Phase Four: Search for patterns. Return to the complete record/ Lay out all the photographs, or view the film its entirety/ Return to the research question. How do these documents speak to and answer your question?/ Contrast realist and subversive readings of the text./ Write an interpretation, based on the principles of interpretation discussed above.	6. Throughout, analyse visible conduct; do not speculate upon what participants may be thinking but analyse what they are doing (in their speech, actions and gazes)

I closely inspected data and created memos and tentative codes that would form the basis of my theories (Silverman, 2014, p.119). I began with intensive analysis of the video content produced by other parties (Artefacts 6, 7 and 11) first and then gradually tested my findings through extensive analysis of the wider data set² (Silverman, 2014, p.114; Böhm, 2004, p.271).

² This was done by hand instead of coding software like Nvivo, simply because the workflow of watching something within Quicktime and then switching to software infuriating and more time-consuming than using notebooks and *Post-It* stickers on the wall. I would then attempt to triangulate any theories against the different data sources, which had already been subject to the 'investigator triangulation' of being created by different people (Flick, 2004, p.178).

Whilst I believe this approach was rigorous and valid, I do believe that it contradicts a fundamental principle of PAR; personally triangulating the different participatory evaluative outputs for veracity goes against the notion of collective ‘sense making’, and gives me control to interpret the evaluation without a mechanism for participant recourse. However, I would counter this argument with three points:

- This is a meta-evaluation, conducted outside of the AR cycle for the sake of separate research question.
- The meta-evaluation is not seeking to deliberately *reinterpret* the participatory evaluative outputs; the intention is to look for repetitive themes within the collective evaluation (a process that is susceptible to my interpretation).
- The meta-evaluation does not have a direct impact back on the participants like most PAR projects would do in a workplace with constant employment.

Despite the deviations from the ideological and methodological approach of PAR, I believe that my evaluative approach was sound and rooted in a desire to enhance the credibility, validity and rigour within the study. A further discussion of this problematical methodological approach is included in Chapter 6 – Discussion.

3.6. Credibility/ Validity/ Rigour

As PAR does not use the positivistic paradigm, it is necessary to determine how the results can be deemed valid, credible and rigorous. ‘Validity’ is not commonly used term by AR practitioners, due to positivistic connotations (Herr and Anderson, 2014, p.62). The term ‘credibility’ more commonly refers to trustworthiness; that the processes and arguments used are reliable to people inside and outside of the project. AR practitioners (Stringer, 1999, p.176 and Greenwood and Levin 2006, p.67) believed that ‘internal credibility’ points exclusively to the participants involved and is achieved through a process of the outsider being credible to the insider with a developed understanding of local conditions, followed by prolonged engagement, and finally procedures so that participants can verify the accuracy of the information recorded. Greenwood and Levin (2006, p.68) believed that their

concept of *workability* is critical to internal credibility, whether a solution has been met that solves the original research problem. Herr and Anderson (2014, p.67) defined workability to be ‘outcome validity’, distinct from ‘democratic validity’, which they used to refer to internal credibility. They distinguished that outcome validity focuses on a solution to the original problem whereas democratic validity focuses on the endorsement and acceptance of the participants. I have previously outlined the challenges of workability in relation to PAR in film production within Section 3.4. - PAR evaluation and so welcome Herr and Anderson’s distinction. In this thesis, I believe the internal credibility and democratic validity of the research area is demonstrated both through the scale of the participant engagement, but also the quality of the partners that endorsed us in various ways throughout the process, such as the Melbourne International Film Festival, Fremantle Media, Ted Hope and Chris Jones. Throughout the project the participants could see photographers and documentarians were observing the process, and the social media platform was participatory so that anyone could say whatever they wanted to the rest of the group. Once information was collated it was shared with the group for verification.

Greenwood and Levin (2006, p.67) referred to ‘external credibility’ as “knowledge capable of convincing someone who did not participate in the inquiry that the results are believable”. This includes triangulation of information from multiple data sources and reflecting on research procedures with an academic colleague or informed associate (Stringer, 1999, p.176). Herr and Anderson (2014, p.68) divided this process into ‘process validity’ and ‘dialogical validity’. Process validity is concerned with the methods and content of the thesis, and addresses concerns such as the nature of evidence and the inclusion of participants’ multiple perspectives. Dialogical validity demands that the research is peer reviewed within the AR community of practice. Whilst I have not shared this project specifically within the AR community, I believe the doctoral process to be critical part of this academic peer review, and I have previously presented at conferences on this research topic³.

³ Prior to the project I presented at the Creative Industries and Creative Communities Conference, *Rethinking the Filmmaking Production Models*, 11 November 2009, Stoke on Trent. Subsequently I presented at MeCCSA, *The 72 Project: using filmmaking to empower networks and foster creative collaboration*, 7 January 2013, Derry

I have also spoken extensively at film festivals about the project, which I believe demonstrates the external credibility and dialogical validity⁴.

Stringer (1999, p.176) identified two other factors: ‘transferability’ and ‘confirmability’. Transferability establishes the “so what?” that enables audiences to identify similarities of the research setting with other contexts, which I will endeavour to address within Chapter 7 – Conclusion. Confirmability refers to readers having an audit trail that clearly describes data handling processes and provides the means by which readers may refer to the raw data (Stringer, 1999, p.177). This was a problematic area for this thesis, as much of the data was spread across different participants and had issues of ownership. For example, the unedited footage from the documentarians was not available to me and could not really be expected when it was not being paid for from the film budget. This will be addressed in Section 3.7. – Limitations.

3.7. Limitations

Stringer (1999, p.177) suggested that researchers “should indicate any limitations that arose from the pragmatic realities of investigation.” In addition to the limitations regarding the methodological approach identified in Section 2.3. – Criticisms of AR, and the issues of positionality addressed in Section 3.1. – Positionality, this project has significant limitations that have impacted on the investigative rigour.

Firstly, much of the paperwork surrounding participant consent for the project resides with the producers of the two films, the drama we shot in 72 hours and the documentary of the process. These ‘release forms’ are essential legal paperwork that need to reside with the producers in order for the films to be screened at festivals. These forms have become part of a legal dispute between Gary Hootor and Staffordshire University as to who owns the film. This dispute prevents either party from commercially exploiting the production, and prevents me from including

⁴ As well as Melbourne I gave talks at festivals including Galway Film Fleadh, the Irish Film Festa in Rome and Raindance Film Festival in London (all in 2011), which all had positive receptions.

the ethical consent forms within my thesis submission. In retrospect, I wish I had asked the participants to sign a third release form pertaining specifically to the research project, but it seemed adequate at the time to be securing their contributions to the film production and their consent to appear in the documentary. I believe that the collected artefacts demonstrate that no one was exploited in the process, and their participation was voluntary yet rewarded with an empowering experience.

A second limitation is that the unedited footage (known as ‘rushes’) for the documentary resides with the documentarians. This is only a limitation inasmuch as we cannot refer to the wider context in which scenes originally appeared or broaden the data set to take in more of the opinions and interviews that were on offer. However, the documentary provides a narrative that the documentarians chose to produce, and that must be respected also. Giving contributors the power of consultation assuaged any concerns that the documentarians may represent the process inappropriately. However, there was a dispute between the producer of *The Ballad of Des & Mo* (Gary Hootor) and the documentarians whereby Gary had delayed signing his release form in order to see the finished documentary first. This created a potential power of veto as opposed to consultation, as Gary could effectively block any potential future of the documentary until he was happy with the final portrayal of the process. Fearing the worst, the documentarians minimised the amount that Gary appeared in the final documentary to limit the extent they would have to redraft. His lack of appearance in the documentary became his major criticism in the consultation, and he was eventually cut out from the narrative all together. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 5.2. – The documentary.

A further limitation is the absence of my personal reflective journal as a data collection method. I wrote extensive private reflections in the months *after* the process but it cannot be considered reliable evidence, partly because it was written in light of the first wave of evaluation, and therefore could be considered contaminated and open to manipulation to arrive at a pre-determined conclusion. My notes from the time itself were scant because I was busy with the film production. Whilst there are still the blog and vlog posts that were published from

the time, I believe they are constrained by the limitations previously outlined in Section 3.3.1.2. – Blogs and vlogs.

3.8. Ethical considerations

Tripp (2015, no pagination) argued that there are serious ethical ramifications involved within participatory projects as it can result in some participants being adversely affected by their involvement. In our film production, we had to seek permission from participants for their voluntary involvement, as the working hours would be longer than the Australian Working Time regulation (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2016). This was noted in the UKFC's (2008, p.18) report as being a common problem with low and micro-budget film productions, and therefore the participants did not consider it an unusual expectation and signed consent forms to agree as much. Greenwood and Levin (2006, p.97) assert that action researchers must not make demands of local stakeholders that they are not willing to make of themselves, and therefore we all signed identical conditions and worked equally as participants.

Tripp (2015, no pagination) established six aims that should be AR projects should aspire to:

- 1) The research should address topics of mutual concern.
- 2) There should be a shared commitment to performing the research.
- 3) It should enable all involved to actively participate in any way they desire.
- 4) Control should be shared over the research processes as evenly as possible.
- 5) The input cost: outcomes value ratio should be similarly beneficial for all participants.
- 6) Inclusive procedures should be established for deciding matters of justice amongst participants.

I believe that we successfully achieved the first five of these aims, but we neglected the sixth. This was a problem in the evaluation stage of the documentary, where the producer Gary Hctor adopted a traditional hierarchical position to influence the

documentary narrative, failing to acknowledge the participatory nature of the documentarians' right to express themselves however they saw fit.

AR is not a mode of research that accepts researchers' co-optation by local actors or power holders either. Balancing active involvement with integrity and critical reflection is fundamental in any AR process.

(Greenwood and Levin, 2006, p.65)

Without a pre-defined procedure for addressing this kind of situation, it became acrimonious and unresolved between the different parties, which I believe disadvantaged everyone involved. I believe this situation could have been avoided had the documentarians got Gary's release form (including a power of consultation caveat) signed *prior* to the filming, which is standard procedure and was the case for most of the crew. Gary's decision to wait to see the documentary before signing the release form created an unofficial power of veto, which led to the situational uncertainty.

Gary's decision to adopt a traditional producer perspective was inappropriate because the documentary was not funded out of our budget. Originally it was planned that the *research* would be funded from an investment of £40,000 from Staffordshire University, which would send three staff and three students to Melbourne and cover flights, hotels and food for five weeks. The film itself was to be funded from external sponsorship and investment and owned by Gary's production company Hello Camera. In reality, the research money became the cash budget for the film itself, and massively impacted on the resources that we had to conduct the research. The failure to raise money for the film itself was because most investors fund products *not* processes and shooting a film in 72 hours represented a big risk. This created an ethical dilemma: who *owns* the films? As university research money ultimately funded *The Ballad of Des and Mo*, it should reside with Staffordshire University, and the documentary belongs to the documentarians. However, this dilemma has never meaningfully been resolved, to the detriment of both films. On the occasions that they have been screened in public since, I have considered it educational fair use to screen them for scholastic reasons and never for personal profit.

A significant proportion of the resources in the film production were provided by companies either seeking direct advertising through association (e.g., Sequence Post), indirect advertising through referrals (e.g., RED cameras), knowledge exchange (e.g., Fremantle Media), association with the festival (e.g., Federation Square) or simply contributing for the sake of being involved (e.g., Lords Lodge). Each of these signed agreements articulating the nature of their involvement and none had *any* control over the editorial of the film content or the research process. I do not believe there is any conscious bias towards any of these organisations or products within the process. All credits are acknowledged on both films as per the customary procedure within filmmaking.

Further ethical considerations were aligned to the MeCCSA (2016) statement of research ethics guidelines:

- “Research results, data and conclusions should be made available in the public domain wherever and to the greatest extent possible.
- Wherever possible policy-making in fields relevant to our research competence should be informed by such research, and researchers should seek to ensure that relevant research is available to and informs the practice of policy makers.
- The conceptualisation, design, formulation and conduct of research should be guided by the theoretical or applied concerns of the researchers rather than by the immediate or pragmatic needs of commissioners or funders of research and should be independent of and unimpeded by those needs.
- The interpretation of research findings should be undertaken by the researchers, who should ensure, and be allowed to ensure, that their analysis and explanation of research findings should be available to anyone with access to or using the research.
- Research should always seek to develop new knowledge and understanding through original investigation, regardless of prevailing orthodoxies, assumptions, or authoritative social and cultural views uninformed by such research.”

These guiding statements informed, and continue to inform my doctoral process. In keeping with Staffordshire University's regulations, I would hope to publish this thesis publicly once completed. The participants that have been named within this thesis have all been named elsewhere previously within other forms of media, and enough time has elapsed regarding the partners involved that no commercial secrets are at risk.

Having defined how the project's methodology was approached and applied, the following chapter will examine the specific situations and circumstances surrounding the project in a reconnaissance.

4. Reconnaissance

Having established the methodological approach, this chapter will examine the specific situations and circumstances surrounding the project and contextualise the artefacts that will follow as data. I believe it is first beneficial to establish the macro-context, in order to address the Action Research (AR) spiral and situate the project within a broader perspective. This is to confront the criticism of Kock et al (1997, p.9) who argued that ‘reports often hide the existence of cycles and the learning process that went on across cyclic iterations.’ In the case of this specific thesis, the project was preceded and followed by cycles that will not be explored within this thesis for the sake of depth and scope. As Herr and Anderson (2014, p.106) established, the on-going nature of Action Research means it may not “be possible to write up the whole undertaking, but rather just a piece of the understanding or intervention that has come about through the inquiry”.

As established in Chapter 2, reconnaissance usually refers to a stage that precedes the *first* iteration of the AR cycle, a preliminary undertaking prior to the action itself. However, as the project could already be considered in motion due to an earlier project in Galway, this reconnaissance will use the macro-context to establish the narrative prior to the project, followed by a situational context to specifically address the actual conditions appertaining to the particular cycle of this project. The cyclical stages that followed this particular project will be summarised later in Chapter 6 - Discussion.

4.1. Macro-context

I wrote, co-produced and co-directed my first feature film *Peppermint* in the spring of 2005. It was a micro-budget feature film shot for £2500 on MiniDV, a popular digital video format. It was shot in 11 days with a crew of eight, in Worcester, England. During the production of the film I realised that I still had a lot to learn about the theory of filmmaking and decided to enrol on a Masters in Film Studies at University College Dublin (UCD), which I began in September 2005. I graduated in the autumn of 2006 having written my thesis on ‘The Impact of Digital Technology on the Filmmaking Process’. The methodology of the thesis included

semi-structured interviews with filmmakers such as John Boorman, Chris Jones and Carl Schoenfeld.

In February 2007 I began a lecturing post in the Faculty of Computing, Engineering and Technology at Staffordshire University, teaching film technology at undergraduate level. I continued to visit Dublin on occasion.

On the 23rd October 2007 I received an email from Carol Comley, the Head of Strategic Development at the UK Film Council, asking for me to participate in their survey on low and micro-budget filmmaking in relation to my co-direction and co-production of *Peppermint*.

In December 2007 I met in Dublin with Conor Murphy, a fellow student at UCD who was working at Filmbase, a non-for profit organisation in the Temple Bar district. We were discussing the UK Film Council's survey in relation to my MA thesis and how their perspective did not resonate with our experiences. In February 2008 we decided (with another UCD graduate Gary Hoctor) to approach the Galway Film Fleadh to see whether they would be interested in an experiment where we would attempt to make a feature length film in 72 hours to demonstrate how digital technology had the capacity to change the way we approach filmmaking. The festival director, Miriam Allen, felt that the project was deserving of a wider audience and agreed to screen whatever we could make in the 72 hours at the Galway Town Hall in the penultimate slot before the final award ceremony. We agreed that the festival programmer Felim McDermott would chair a Q&A with the cast and crew following the screening.

On the 26th June 2008, Laura Hypponen from Northern Alliance emailed me the UK Film Council's finished report on Low and Micro-Budget Film Production, in which *Peppermint* appeared within the appendices as part of their data set.

On 10th July 2008, we began filming *Watching and Waiting* in Galway. Staffordshire University supported the project with £5000, a van and five members of film technology staff and some audio-visual equipment. Panasonic sponsored the project with cameras and data cards. The local Apple supplier in Galway provided

Macs for the edit suites. Filmbase provided equipment and insurance for the project. The film was successfully made in 72 hours, had a running time of 70 minutes and screened, as promised, on the final night of the festival in the Galway Town Hall. The Q&A, including questions from the audience of approximately 250 people, followed the screening. Harry Wilkinson, a friend of the producer Gary Hocht, informally documented the process on video (see Artefact 1).

In February 2009, we took the finished film to Berlin to be screened alongside the Berlinale festival and European Film Market. Miriam Allen introduced Gary Hocht and me to Mark Woods and Claire Dobbin (respectively the Executive Producer and Chair) of the Melbourne International Film Festival. They were impressed with the process and asked if we could repeat the process in Melbourne in July 2010. At this point I decided to register for a PhD at Staffordshire University and use this as a research project.

In light of the Galway project, I was approached by Gary Carter, the Chief Operating Officer of FremantleMedia in May 2009, to present at an Executive Board Meeting in Berlin. The topic was how digital technology was affecting the production process. During this period, I informally asked Gary Carter whether FremantleMedia would be interested in financing the project in Melbourne, which he declined, citing that they do not fund processes, but products.

I approached Staffordshire University's Deputy Vice Chancellor, Paul Richards, about possible sponsorship of the '72 Hour Movie' as the project was now known. He believed that external financial sponsorship from non-media related companies (such as prominent drinks manufacturers who often sponsor cultural events) could damage the academic integrity of the project. He therefore agreed to pay £40k towards the flights and accommodation of three staff to ensure the project could take place. In return for this, I was encouraged to explore potential returns on investment for the university, although this was not explicitly linked to the film (i.e. the film did not have to make a profit to please the university). In contrast to FremantleMedia, the University was funding process, not product.

I arrived in Melbourne on Wednesday 30th June 2010 and prepared for five weeks before we began shooting *The Ballad of Des and Mo* on the 5th August. I shall explore this period of time in detail in Section 4.2. – Situational Context.

It is possible to retrospectively consider the narrative prior to Melbourne in terms of AR cycles and interpret it in different ways. It could be argued that the experience of my first feature, my Masters thesis and the project in Galway could all be considered reconnaissance and ‘setting the stage’ for the project. However, I believe it represents the first iteration of an AR cycle, albeit informally structured and improperly documented and recorded. I believe it can be seen as such:

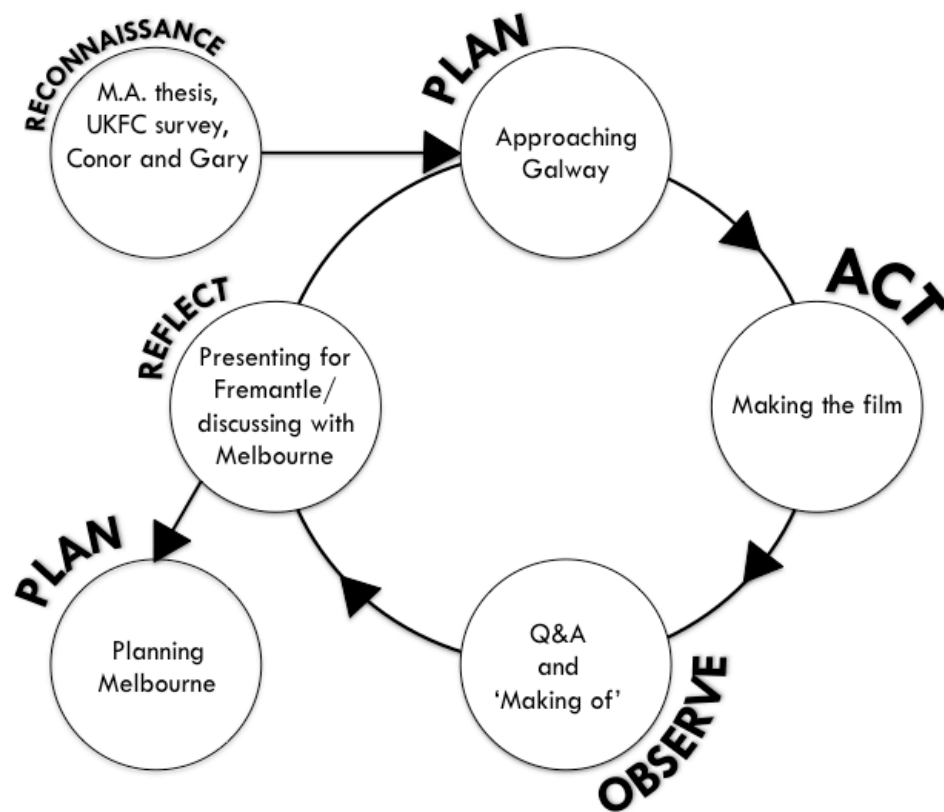


Figure 2 The informal macro-contextual AR cycle

Whilst this cannot be considered an ideal manifestation of an AR cycle (the participants alter within different stages for example), to label it ‘reconnaissance’ would be inappropriate also. As Kock et al (1997, p.9) believed reports ‘hide the existence of cycles and the learning process that went on across cyclic iterations’, I believe titling this period as ‘reconnaissance’ would be to deny two fundamental facts:

- Action had taken already place.
- We had subsequently learnt things from that action.

This previous action and learning is important, as it would consciously and subconsciously inform some of our decision making within Melbourne.

4.2. Situational Context

In this section I will focus specifically on my entire time in Melbourne (June 30th – 27th August 2010), establish the key stakeholders and define their relationships to one another, including how contact was made and the roles negotiated (Stringer, 1999, p.63). This section will also detail how we built the trust, skills and community enthusiasm for the collaborative project.

Melbourne International Film Festival

Our original invitation to Australia was from Claire Dobbin and Mark Woods, the director and executive producer of the Melbourne International Film Festival.

Established in 1952, the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) is one of the oldest film festivals in the world and the most significant screen event in Australia. An iconic Melbourne event, the festival takes place annually in the heart of the city, presenting an acclaimed screening program alongside industry and celebratory events.

(MIFF, 2016)

Claire said she was motivated by the sense of event and buzz that the project could create at the festival (see Artefact 2). Whilst I have no evidence, I suspect that we were also contributing to various key performance indicators (such as audience engagement, technological innovation etc.) that the festival needed in order to satisfy their sponsorship from partners. There were uncorroborated rumours that the artistic director, Richard Moore, was not keen on our project, and did not feel that we suited the rest of the programme that he had carefully selected. Richard had previously attracted international attention in 2009 for selecting a documentary that was critical of China, resulting in Chinese hackers attempting to censor the screening by taking down the festival website to prevent ticket sales (New Yorker,

2009). There were stories in the press prior to our arrival in Melbourne that there was a conflict between Richard Moore and the executive board, exacerbated by the hacking situation, which was resulting in Richard stepping down once the festival finished (The Age, 2010). The ramification for us was a feeling that we were dislocated from the festival, and that we were not really promoted meaningfully by their public relations team or supported in the run-up to the festival itself. Aside from the promise of the screening at the Australian Centre for Moving Image (ACMI) and some contacts that we could approach for resources, their involvement was minimal. However, as momentum built and the project became more visible, the festival gave us increasing attention.

For some Melbournians, it seemed unusual that our micro-budget project had been selected by MIFF, due to the festival's prominent, traditional, mainstream identity. We were often told we would be more suited to the Melbourne Underground Film Festival (MUFF), a splinter event that began in 2000 in opposition to MIFF and focused on independent filmmaking. Initially I was concerned that this would damage our credibility within the local micro-budget filmmaking community, but thankfully our original strange detachment from MIFF worked to our benefit.

Melbourne's media 'scene'

Melbourne's media scene is vibrant. It is home to two daily local newspapers: the *Herald Sun* and *The Age*, and a national daily *The Australian*. There are six free-to-air television stations: ABC Victoria, (ABV), SBS Victoria (SBS), Seven Melbourne (HSV), Nine Melbourne (GTV), Ten Melbourne (ATV) and a community television channel C31 Melbourne (MGV). Subsequently, plenty of television shows are produced in Melbourne, most famously *Neighbours*, but also drama shows including *Underbelly* and *Wentworth*, national news-based programs such as *The Project*, *Insiders* and *ABC News Breakfast*, game shows such as *Million Dollar Minute* and *Family Feud* and television formats such as *Dancing with the Stars* and *MasterChef*. Sky News and Fox Sports also have studio facilities based in Melbourne. There is also plenty of radio, including 'public' (i.e., state-owned ABC and SBS), community stations and networked-owned commercial stations.

These industries provide employment for many media graduates from either the Victorian College of Arts (VCA) in the University of Melbourne or their competitors in the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). There are two other local universities that also have media courses, Swinburne and Monash, but these are less central. I believe that graduates often enter industry through their respective alumnus network and therefore informal and jocular rivalries can exist between these groups. A fifth institution, the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) is predominately based in Sydney but runs additional training opportunities in Melbourne.

Finally, Open Channel is Victoria's independent screen industry skills centre, a not-for-profit, membership-based organization connecting emerging and early career filmmakers to professional practice through professional development, events and networking. This is the cornerstone of a far more extensive ecosystem of events, organisations and societies that meet across the city in various venues, at various times and in varying specialisms of independent filmmaking, documentaries and video art, all of which I would not have enough time to establish meaningful connections with. This was a limitation of the timeframe that I had in Melbourne to prepare for the project. However, I was capable of approaching some of these organisations through social media, as opposed to traditional media.

Recruiting crew

A core of the crew would be 'veterans' from the project in Galway. Myself, John Bradburn and Andy Paton were all staff at Staffordshire University and had all been present on the project in Ireland. On both projects, John Bradburn was responsible for the camera team and Andy Paton was working within the edit team. My UCD classmates Gary Hctor (the producer) and Gareth Nolan (an editor) were also in the Galway project and joined us in Melbourne. Ann-Marie Brennan joined us as an associate producer in Melbourne having been a general fixer in Galway. Harry Wilkinson, who had filmed the behind the scenes in Galway, returned to film similar footage in Melbourne. There were two newcomers from Ireland, Libby

Clarke⁵ (associate producer) and Sarah Sweetnam (a line producer) and three students from Staffordshire University: Danny Lennon, Tom Sykes and James Sieradzki.

However, it was implicit within the invitation from MIFF that we would recruit a predominantly local crew to shoot the film in Melbourne. This process began via social media prior to me arriving in Australia. One example was Couchsurfing, a not-for-profit organisation⁶ offering a web platform primarily for hospitality exchange. Members could host travellers, who would ‘surf’ on the host’s couch. I was an active Couchsurfing host in Birmingham, having hosted over 100 visitors to the city and earned a title within the organisation known as ‘ambassador’. This title demonstrated my credentials as an active participant on the website, and therefore when I posted for support within the Melbourne community whilst still in the UK, people could view my profile and see that I was authentic. As well as finding hosts for my initial few days in Melbourne, I triggered an active community of participants that were willing to contribute in various forms. For example, one member acted as a driver within our crew whilst another helped us with links to production equipment. Similar attempts were made to contact Melbourne groups on Facebook, who had already self-organised themselves around various themes in filmmaking, but without the reciprocal nature that was at the core of the Couchsurfing community, the effect was less successful.

My primary contact in Melbourne was Andrew Brown, an ex-student of mine that had withdrawn from Staffordshire University to study at RMIT. I had been in contact with him prior to arriving in Melbourne and prepared him for what we would need to achieve. He scouted possible locations for crew meetings and identified groups that would be able to support us, such as Doco3000, the documentary community where we found the documentarians. Andrew had finished his studies in RMIT, had been a volunteer in ACMI but was free to join

⁵ It is relevant, for the sake of clarity, that Libby Clarke is Gary Hocker’s wife. The significance of this will be explored in detail in Section 6.1.5. - Pressure on direct and indirect friendships and relationships.

⁶ Couchsurfing became a for-profit organisation in 2011, and I ceased to be involved in the community.

me full time at the point at which I arrived in Melbourne, and as such, became my assistant.

Gary Hctor, Libby Clarke and Ann-Marie Brennan also triggered the Irish community in Melbourne remotely. They would not join Andrew and me in Australia until about 2 weeks prior to the filming. However, their contacts included Seamus Bradley, the associate editor at The Age newspaper, who kindly supported us with a half-page article covering the story on page 3 of their Sunday edition on 11th July 2010 (see Artefact 3.1.). The article included a contact for volunteers to get in touch, which deluged Andrew Brown and myself with such a volume of email that it was difficult to process and prepare for the film. The press office within MIFF were also very unhappy that we had organised this ourselves, as it deviated from their press strategy, and meant that we were getting better coverage than other films that may have perhaps been promised better promotion.

On July 19th 2010, Andrew and I invited the volunteers to an event in 1000£Bend, a coffee shop with large exhibition space in the Central Business District (CBD) of Melbourne. We had approximately 60 attendees. I explained the process and asked the attendees to fill out a form that outlined their availability, their experience, their previous filmmaking experience and various other information regarding contact details and dietary requirements etc. With this information we began to build a crew that would have different roles and structure than usual filmmaking, simply because of the 72-hour time constraint on the production. The dominant organisational model of film production is similar to a family tree: a producer and director at the top and then spawning various roles until the runners at the bottom. Our film did have a sub-division of skills to prevent chaos, but the largest part of the crew was a versatile team of generalists, who are capable of turning their hands to a variety of tasks instead of standing around when their own job role was not needed. Most importantly, we attempted to have horizontal communication across the process, where anyone could talk to anyone else without the bottlenecks of the linear ‘chain of command’ vertical system found in the dominant model. The intention was for this flexibility to help us achieve our task cheaply and quickly (Section 4.3. – Self Reconnaissance addresses this process in more detail). We selected starting

positions for people and forewarned them that we would need them to be open-minded and flexible about moving to wherever the demand was in the production.

The crew structure that we picked locally were selected indiscriminately from their backgrounds, which resulted in a diverse team of which very few had worked together before. We tried to accommodate everyone who volunteered in some capacity or another, although a few quickly lost interest in the project and decided not to participate.

There was one specialist role that we needed to recruit back in the UK due to the complexity of the RED digital workflow we would be using. The RED cameras are capable of filming at 4K resolution, widely considered ‘cinema quality’. This generates a lot of data, so we needed someone with the specialist knowledge of how to get the data flowing smoothly from the camera on location, into the edit and into the cinema in time for the screening. I approached Ben Foakes, a fellow graduate from Bournemouth University who owned Sequence Post, a post-production company in Soho, London. He was not able to join us, but he offered his employee Mike Fisher, another graduate of Bournemouth University, who subsequently joined us in Melbourne to handle the workflow.

Recruiting cast

The process of recruiting cast was primarily driven by The Age article (Artefact 3.1.), and by posting character profiles on a website called castingcallpro.com. We subsequently received CVs, headshots and showreels from prospective actors and then auditioned people that we felt had the right appearance or experience. There were some exceptions to this process.

I noticed that Kate O’Toole had liked our project’s Facebook page, due to her connection to the Galway Film Fleadh and our previous film there. Kate is the daughter of Peter O’Toole, the actor who famously played Lawrence of Arabia. Kate is a great actor in her own right, but her famous father was of interest to the local press and brought a lot more credibility and attention to the project. I messaged her directly, despite having never met, and asked whether she’d consider joining us

in Melbourne if we covered all her expenses. She agreed and joined the cast ten days before we began the film.

Don Bridges joined us a few days before we started filming on the recommendation of the lead actor Mick Cahill and replaced a previous actor that was simply crumbling under the pressure of the tight deadlines.

For a week prior to filming we rehearsed and had read-throughs of the script in a spare space above 1000£Bend in the centre of Melbourne.

Recruiting documentarians

I decided to recruit specific documentarians as opposed to getting members of our own crew to take it in turns to shoot behind-the-scenes footage, so that there was a sense of objectivity and ownership of the narrative. The fear was that the observation would get neglected if our own crew were responsible for it, especially at the points where we were potentially stressed and under pressure on the film project. Whilst the documentarians could be considered proxy ‘outsiders’ and non-participants within the group, I believed that recruiting them from the independent Melbourne film scene would mean that they were ‘inside’ our community of practice. Furthermore, I do not believe that the AR cycle could have been meaningfully enacted without substantial observation of the process, and that our own capacity to observe whilst in action by making field notes would have been impractical.

Andrew Brown recommended that we visit a documentary collective called Doco3000 who meet in the Fitzroy suburb of Melbourne. The collective offers a free project development workshop once a month, where filmmakers can screen up to 10 minutes of their non-fiction works-in-progress and receive 10 minutes of directed feedback in a supportive environment. I pitched our project to approximately fifty attendees and said that we were seeking filmmakers that could document the process and in return, the two films would travel to festivals together, giving a platform to their filmmaking. A few filmmakers expressed an interest, but two in particular were far more enthusiastic than any others. James Arneman and Katie Mitchell were Melbournians with their own equipment and with time to

devote to following the project. They identified with my rationale for the research and were keen to be involved. They were offered access to all areas and they created contributor release forms that all participants were consenting to the documentary crew being present and potentially being filmed on the location. Specific interviews would be on each participant's permission, and crewmembers were offered power of consultation to the final draft of the documentary's edit. The documentarians were not paid for the project but agreed that the films would be screened alongside one another at future festivals.

James and Katie recruited Emily Bissland to help them shoot on two sites at once, in order to observe the various stages of production as they unfolded simultaneously. Harry Wilkinson, who had shot footage in the original project in Galway, also joined their team.

Two photographers were also commissioned to document the process simultaneously. Stephen Skok was a media lecturer at RMIT and an amateur photographer. He volunteered to photograph the process, as he was keen to see the research project up close. Dr. Erminia Colucci, a mental health research fellow at University of Melbourne also volunteered to document the process, again out of a general interest in the research. Both were given access to all areas and took it in shifts to photograph the process. They shared their pictures at the end, with copyrighted tags so they could be credited if they were used for any press releases or promotional material. Like the documentarians, the photographers were not paid.

Production facilities

We were most fortunate that Gary Carter, the Chief Operating Officer of FremantleMedia, who had refused to sponsor the project with cash, was kind enough to provide us with free office space, beside the production offices of their *Neighbours* show. These offices were based in the Richmond suburb of Melbourne. We were placed under the informal supervision of Tony Skinner, the Managing Director of Grundy Television, FremantleMedia's subsidiary in Melbourne. Our free office space was in exchange for informal conversations with their staff about our project during different opportunities in the five weeks. We would usually

spend Friday afternoon's discussing our projects informally over cheese and wine provided by FremantleMedia.

A couchsurfer called Daniel Zeller introduced us to Inspiration Studios, who provided our cameras and edit stations for free in exchange for a graphic at the start of the movie and a written testimonial, vouching how robust the RED camera and Apple workflow could be under the pressure of intense production. Their motivation was largely to combat an industry-held assumption that RED cameras were unreliable in comparison to traditional celluloid cameras. Whilst our project ran the risk of going wrong, they were happy to provide equipment that could potentially demonstrate that the RED workflow was robust in the hands of people 'that know what they are doing', thus putting any criticism back onto the filmmakers who prefer celluloid. To help us smoothen the workflow, we were provided with four 16GB compact flash cards, which were more reliable than the larger recording storage drives that had moving internal parts and were liable to drop frames of footage. The 16GB cards could store eight minutes of footage then would need replacing. We therefore tried to rotate these cards by 'dumping' footage on to external hard drives on location, cloning the footage onto a secondary drive for insurance, then *deleting* the original footage on the compact flash card so that it could be reformatted and used again. This process is risky, because footage is being erased before it has reached the edit suites, which can cause significant problems if files get lost. However, we had no reliable alternative, so it was the only option available to us.

One week prior to the filming, we established edit suites in a gallery space within the Federation Square complex, a short walk from ACMI, where the film would ultimately be screened. This would become our primary base during production as it was in the CBD and central to all of our filming locations.

Our filming locations were spread across the city, the furthest north being Tullamarine Airport and the furthest south being Lord's Lodge Hostel in Prahan, approximately 30 kilometres apart. All of the locations agreed to us filming for free, usually in exchange for social media 'shout-outs' to our followers on Facebook.

Prior to the majority of the crew arriving, my accommodation was either in Lord's Lodge Hostel in Prahan or couchsurfing with local hosts in the community. Once the key crew from the UK and Ireland joined me, we moved into a Citadines hotel in the CBD, where we had a discount for our block booking. Our meals were all paid for by the budget, except a significant hot meal for the entire crew, which was sponsored by PJ O'Brien's Pub in the Southbank district of the CBD.

Culture Ireland

We were also supported by a €3000 grant from Culture Ireland, who encourage opportunities for Irish artists and companies to present and promote their work at strategic international festivals and venues. This primarily funded the Irish crew's travel to Melbourne. However, Culture Ireland also partnered with MIFF to host an Irish Embassy event at a venue called Cabinet in the CBD. There was a concerted effort to bring together the Irish community in Melbourne to support our project, which resulted in offers of support such as the free crew meal at PJ O'Brien's Pub and most usefully, the offer of a crew bus that could transport the participants around the city for free.

Having established how these different participants all came together and interacted with one another, I will now address my particular positionality in relation to the project.

4.3. Self-reconnaissance

Having established the key stakeholders and defined their relationships to one another, I will use "self-reconnaissance" to establish my positionality in relation to these specific stakeholders. This is unlike the "self-reconnaissance" that Dillon (2008, p.11) believed was essential for uncovering unconscious values or bias. As explored in Section 3.2., McTaggart (1996, p. 252) was sceptical of analysing one's "self" in a search for ideological purity. However, I believe the dynamics of the film project require further contextualisation in order to demonstrate how they relate to the PAR framework.

Section 3.1. previously explored the way in which my positionality could be interpreted differently, as both an ‘insider’ as a filmmaker and an ‘outsider’ to the Melbourne film community. I believe that the situation could best be defined as reciprocal collaboration between insider and outsider teams (this is as it is described in Table 2 in Section 3.1.). As these collaborative forms of participatory action research usually explore equitable power relations, the relationships between crewmembers would have to be dramatically altered from the traditional hierarchical structure of a film crew.

The friendly outsider is a coach, not a director or a boss. The last thing most local groups who are stuck in difficult situations need is someone else telling them what to do. The coach counts on local people to be the talented players and helps them improve their skills and strategies.

(Greenwood and Levin, 2006, p. 126)

The friendly outsider is a coach, *not a director*. In filmmaking terms, the director is at the centre of a production driving it forward, usually with a hierarchical structure that obeys the command of the person above them. As this approach is against the fundamental democratic ethos at the centre of PAR, I either needed to rethink the structural hierarchy within the production and make it more democratic or scrap the PAR approach. I chose to attempt restructuring the production process, as it did not contravene the criteria set out by the UKFC and could potentially contribute to how the methodology may yield different results from the original report.

Figure 3 illustrates the dominant filmmaking organizational structure. It is a hierarchy of roles that symbolises where the responsibility lies. At the top are the people responsible for the most things, and they then delegate sections of that responsibility to other people ‘below’ them who then assume the responsibility as a proxy. This model has evolved over time, adding new responsibilities as they emerged, like the sound department. The model was defined early on and has survived political, social and technological changes worldwide.

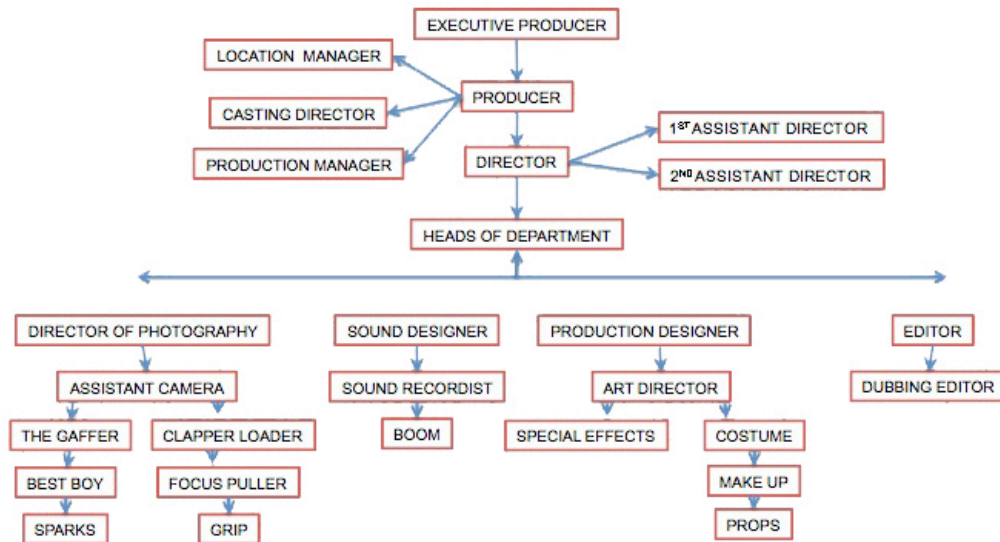


Figure 3 Organisational structure of film production

It would not be suitable for a PAR project to adopt the same model and insist that everyone just works harder and faster than they normally would. Therefore, I reassessed all of the responsibilities that would need to occur within the project and reassigned them to whom I felt could do them best. Admittedly, I built much of these on the basis of the skill sets that I knew various people within my crew possess, as opposed to a model that was built with no knowledge of the crew and then forced onto any given individual. I altered the traditional titles of the roles and gave them new responsibilities and remits, designed to support the task of making a film within a short timeframe. As the traditional ‘director’ for example, I gave myself the title ‘Project Leader’. Gary Hctor was called the Project Manager (the closest thing to a producer). The reassigned titles went on throughout the crew, due to the fact that the new roles did not carry the same responsibilities as the traditional roles, and therefore they required new titles.

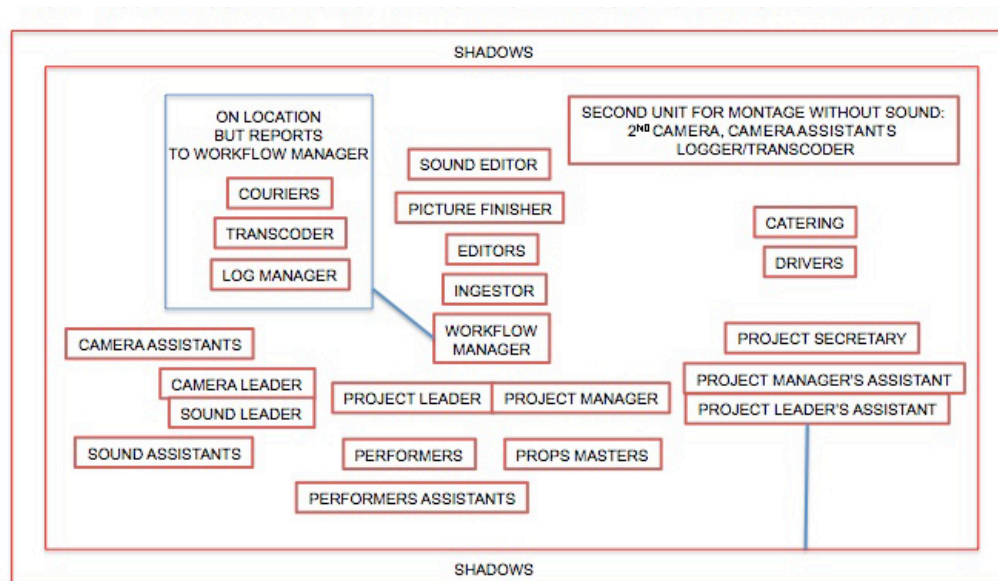


Figure 4 The 72-hour structure

I visualised this organisational structure (see Fig. 4) to be different from the existing model. Instead of being situated at the top of the project with a series of people ‘underneath’ me, I visualised the Project Manager and I to be at the centre, surrounded by the crew. The roles split out to various other roles, but unlike the vertical communicative routes of the old ‘chain of command’ system, there was a horizontal communication that I believe reflected our collaborative effort more truly.

Football tactics were an inspiration when developing this model. I often likened the flexibility of our approach to the different formations in which teams can be arranged (see Fig. 5). For example, the traditional formation of 4-4-2 outfield players places equal emphasis on defence and possession and to a lesser extent, attack. A 5-3-2 formation places more emphasis on defence and less on possession, but maintains a presence of two strikers upfront for a counter-attack.

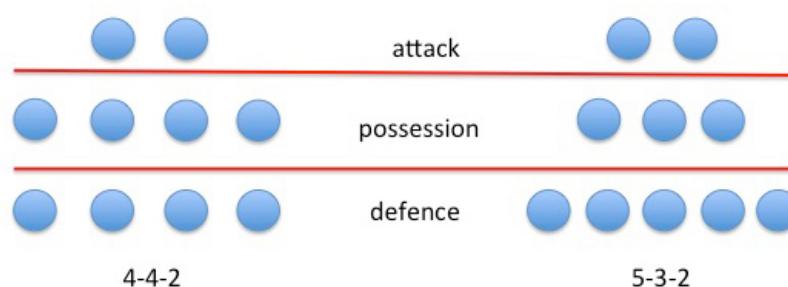


Figure 5 Football formations

With a large crew of versatile generalists we were capable of changing formation, and turn our hands to a variety of tasks instead of standing around when our own job role was not needed. Therefore, our formation was more flexible than the dominant model. With the football analogy, the notion that I was a ‘coach’ instead of a ‘director’ still left me on the proverbial sidelines barking orders. Instead, I liked to think of myself as a captain, on the pitch and leading by example. I was often seen lifting kit, moving lights or making tea. Contributors were asked where they would like to be based within the production before filming began, and within that space, there was relative freedom to assert where they could contribute best.

The visual impression of the dominant model (Fig. 3) looks much like a river, with a source and a flow of responsibility towards a delta of runners. It is linear and sequential. The visual impression of our model reflects a whole entity, in which we are ‘in it’ together, and the process is collaborative. There was a need for some semblance of order and priority otherwise it there would be chaos, but the need for feedback was factored in to the model. We created the ‘three things’ rule, whereby participants would be asked for three ideas instead of passing responsibility back up the traditional chain. For example, in the traditional model, a director of photography could turn to the director and ask “what shot do you want?” whereas our approach would be for the camera leader to offer three potential shot choices to the project leader and we would negotiate from there. This process was not only fundamental to it being participatory action research, but also because it was micro-budget filmmaking. The dominant model is designed for a process whereby participants are being paid, and therefore it appeals to their *extrinsic* motivation (e.g.; money). As our group consisted of volunteers, our process had to appeal to their *intrinsic* motivation, that they were appreciated on set and getting something out of the experience⁷. The ‘three things’ rule was an important part of the sense of collective collaboration. Another factor that helped to increase participation and reduce hierarchical autocracy was the timeframe. The 72-hour deadline meant that I could not be everywhere at once and telling people how to solve their problems.

⁷ Extrinsic motivation is concerned with external goals, such as money or tangible benefits, as opposed to intrinsic motivation, which is a personal, ‘internal’ sense of accomplishment or satisfaction.

As I designed the new structure, it could be argued that the process of design was no more democratic or participatory than simply conforming to the existing dominant model. The participants had not been consulted on how to arrange themselves. However, Greenwood and Levin (2006, p.96) argued that

At the beginning of a research process, the outsider makes decisions and teaches and trains local participants on topics that both consider important. At the same time, the outsider is responsible for encouraging insiders to take control of the developmental process.

I believe the ‘three things’ rule and the fact that I could not be everywhere at once meant that insiders had an element of control over the process.

It could be argued that by developing and assigning the roles I was overstepping the role of the ‘facilitator’, a term used within some AR/PV literature to describe the role of the researcher in the participatory context (Stringer, 1999; Lunch and Lunch, 2006; Botes and Van Rensburg 2000). It is the facilitator’s role to facilitate organisational and operational processes for participants rather than defining or controlling them, and whilst they can contribute to tasks, they should not take over them (Stringer, 1999). I believe that leading the project could be perceived to be the antithesis of this. In the context of PV, a facilitator would train participants with the processes of filmmaking and then enable them to conduct the filmmaking themselves (Lunch and Lunch, 2006, p.59). I did not deem the training necessary, as we had mostly attracted people with previous filmmaking experience. Many of the other processes, such as camera operation and editing were participatory and I was not in control of them due to the 72-hour restriction.

I did not explicitly adopt the concept of a facilitator as I interpreted the primary concern of impartial facilitation to be related to projects with a specifically emancipatory context. The fear is that facilitators can manipulate participants in various ways, intentionally or unconsciously, and lead projects in ways that are not democratic. This manipulation by a facilitator is termed *facipulation* (Constantino-David, 1982, p.194). This is considered to be a negative, ethical obstacle within community participation (Botes and Van Rensburg, 2000, p.43), where the

facilitator can influence the outcomes and decision making of a participatory group towards results that they may not have come to by themselves. I do not think this was so critical within our project, as the emancipatory aspect was not so prevalent; we were not aiming to liberate filmmakers, empower them or leave an infrastructure of self-determination. Our task was to conduct a film production together and gather everyone's perspectives on the process. Also, my positionality meant that I was both a mixture of insider and outsider with the participatory group; a filmmaker and a researcher. I was not representing a group to which I did not belong.

Having established the dynamics of the various relationships in the project, the following chapter will now present the data, which will act as evidence when evaluating whether the PAR methodology presents a different perspective of low and micro-budget film production from the 'comprehensive picture' that the UKFC claimed to portray.

5. Data

Section 3.4. – Evaluation previously outlined how the evaluation process worked within the PAR cycle and the detailed the artefacts that would form the outputs of that evaluation. This chapter will provide brief synopses to accompany those evaluative outputs, along with other artefacts that have been collated; as these combined will provide evidence to be examined further in Chapter 6 – Discussion, in order to answer whether the PAR methodology does present an alternative perspective of low and micro-budget film production that differs from the UKFC’s positivist approach. The artefacts are listed and available on the USB drive included with this project.

5.1. Participant SWOT analysis

The participant SWOT analysis was planned as one of the primary evaluative data collection methods. Despite participants being made aware of its importance and making the material widely available for participants to complete, the response was dismal. The SWOT templates were made available at the wrap party after the screening, at the same time as people were completing their contributor release forms and permissions if they had not already done so. The crew were encouraged to fill them out anonymously and pop them into a makeshift ballot box that was sealed. Nevertheless, there were only four responses from a crew of 67 present at the wrap party, fewer than 6% of the total crew size. This was not a satisfactory sample so the data collected is rendered meaningless. The few that were collected were positive but incredibly vague and futile to analyse (e.g., one participant simply wrote ‘it was great’ under strengths and ‘we needed more coffee!!!’ under weaknesses).

This process was extremely disappointing and caused a significant level of stress once the ballot box had been opened after the party to reveal so few participant contributions. The opportunity to collect such valuable contributions had been lost and there were no real chances to have such a large number of the crew together again. The failure of this data collection method will be discussed in detail within Chapter 6 – Discussion.

5.2. The documentary

The documentary was completed in June 2011, almost one year after the filming had taken place in Australia. James Arneman and Katie Mitchell had over 31 hours of footage to sift through, which was ultimately edited into 61 minutes. The documentary *I've Got This Idea For A Film* presents the documentarians evaluation of the process and provides both evidence of the activity (observation) and interviews (reflection). The documentary can be seen as Artefact 11 on the accompanying USB drive. Whilst the film itself will be considered as evidence within the next chapter's discussion, there are elements around the production of the documentary that should be addressed for the sake of disclosure.

Section 3.7. – Limitations addressed Gary Hector's refusal to sign his release form until he had seen the finished draft, creating a power of veto as opposed to a power of consultation. The documentarians minimised the amount that Gary appeared in the final documentary to limit the extent they would have to redraft. His subsequent lack of appearance in the film became his major criticism in the consultation, and he was eventually cut out from the narrative all together. Gary did not sign the contributor release form *prior* to filming simply because he was busy and the documentarians did not see an urgent need to pursue him, as they never envisaged that he would refuse to sign. This was perhaps naïve on their behalf, but I believe they were operating in good faith. Gary grew increasingly disappointed throughout the filming process that the documentary crew were paying little attention to his production team of Ann Marie Brennan, Sarah Sweetnam and his wife, Olivia Clarke. Believing they were being under-represented and under-valued in the process, Gary took umbrage with the documentarians after the screening and made his complaint clear; he would not sign his release form until he was satisfied that the process was honestly reflected. This was disappointing as Gary and I simultaneously graduated in 2006 with Masters in Film Studies from University College Dublin, and so were aware of the contestable nature of truth within documentary form, making it unreasonable for Gary to insist on the film to focus on his vision of the process. He also knew that the PAR process meant that the

documentarians should be able to offer their perspective as they saw fit, without coercion or needing to agree a narrative on what could be considered *honestly reflected*.

However, Gary did raise two fundamentally valid points about the documentary that deserve to be addressed. Firstly, the documentary has an ambiguous timeline, despite having occasions whereby the timeline is explicitly stated. For example, interviews were filmed at different stages of the production and then intercut with sequences that could be perceived to be at a certain point within the 72 hours. For example, interviews with Andrew Brown and myself in the 33rd minute of the finished documentary were not filmed within the 72 hours of production but in the days running up to the filming yet are intercut with footage of us commuting to the airport to film a sequence. Gary's major frustration was that there was ambiguity about the gap between finishing the film and arriving in the cinema, which is never really addressed within the documentary. Gary's second criticism was that the film focussed more on me as a character than on the process. I think this is a valid criticism and I too was frustrated that the documentarians had deviated from the brief of *following the process*. However, I assume that they were looking for a narrative thread on which to cut the documentary, and as their edit took place without me present to remind them of the methodology, they slipped into more conventional storytelling and searched for a character arc.

However, I believe these weaknesses with the documentary were foreseen and mitigated by collecting other artefacts to triangulate it against.

5.3. Other significant artefacts

Whilst the SWOT analysis and the documentary were meant to provide examples of the participatory evaluation stage of the PAR cycle, there were other significant artefacts collected during the PAR process that can be considered as evidence when trying to evaluate whether the methodology yielded a different perspective than the UKFC's report.

5.3.1. Photographs

Stephen Skok and Erminia Colucci took 397 photographs over the 72 hours of the production. The photographs provide further evidence of the process and can be used to help triangulate the data within the evaluation. These are labelled as Artefact 12 on the USB drive.

5.3.2. Blogs and vlogs

From August 2009 to September 2010, I recorded 49 video logs (vlogs) and wrote 2 written blog posts on our own 72hourmovie.com website and wrote a further 15 guest blogs on other prominent filmmaker's blogs (two for Chris Jones, four for Randy Finch, nine for Ted Hope).

The vlogs on our website were largely aimed at the general public audience as opposed to an academic record of the process. Their purpose varied from documenting our progress through to asking for audience engagement. They were each approximately three minutes. These are catalogued within Artefact 4.

The guest blogs were written with a few objectives in mind. Firstly, it is a form of peer review. Chris Jones is the author of several books on filmmaking, including *The Guerilla Filmmakers Handbook*. Randy Finch was the Director of the Graduate Program in Film at the University of Central Florida in 2010 but is now an International Professor at Taipei National University of the Arts. Ted Hope was an independent producer in New York, having produced movies such as *American Splendour* (2003) and *21 Grams* (2003), but is now head of production for Amazon Original Movies. I approached each of them to write guest posts on their blogs as I was a reader of their blogs and they each had a large community of followers. This exposure was the second reason for guest blogging, as it took us to a new audience. Each of the bloggers needed to curate their blogs authentically with relevant material for fear of losing their audience, so I believe that the peer review process demonstrates the validity and relevance of the posts.

A further benefit of the vlogs and blogs was transparency and sharing the process with the wider community. Unlike peer-reviewed journals, whose timescale is much slower and the readership is predominantly academic, the vlogs and blogs invited comments from the community of practice in real-time, as we went through the process. I believed this was fundamental to the PAR process as it presented our research to a diverse audience of enthusiasts, academics and practitioners as opposed to a homogenous academic one. The guest blogs can be read in Artefact 5.

5.3.3. Channel Ten appearances

One of the volunteers on the project, Paris Thomson, had a connection with a Network Ten television show called *The Circle*, an Australian morning talk show. Two segments were planned for a show on Monday 9th August 2010. The first was a magazine style article by their ‘roving reporter’ Sean Lynch, who followed the process on set for three days and made a three-minute, light-hearted report from the location, including interviews with Don Bridges, Jennifer Hall, Paris Thomson and myself. This can be seen as Artefact 6. The second segment was a live studio interview with myself, Kate O’Toole and Gary Hootor. This can be seen as Artefact 7.

5.3.4. Triple R radio interview

Paris Thomson was also instrumental in getting us an interview on Triple R, a popular Australian community radio station, based in Melbourne. Paul Harris, a film critic who has presented the Filmbuff Forecast on Triple R since 1982, interviewed Gary Hootor and me. Paul Harris was also a lecturer in the Film and TV course at Swinburne University and a lecturer for the Professional Screenwriting course at RMIT. The 20-minute interview was recorded live and broadcast on Saturday 7th August 2010, at the end of the 72-hour production, but before the film was screened on the Sunday.

Like the guest blogs, I believe that the interview is simultaneously a form of reflection and peer review. The interview can be heard upon the USB drive, labelled as Artefact 8.

5.3.5. Open Channel podcast

I was invited by Open Channel on August 26th 2010 to be interviewed as part of a seminar in front of an audience, which was also recorded for a podcast. The interview lasted 75 minutes and comprised of contributions from the audience, including Don Bridges and Aaron Jakubenko (both of whom starred in the film). The recording was almost three weeks since the start of the filming process, so had a different reflective perspective than either the Network Ten appearance or the Triple R interview. The podcast can be listened to as Artefact 9.

5.3.6. Newspaper articles

There were a few articles for small newspapers in the UK and Ireland that were basically reprinting our press release, which are not really suitable as evidence. However, there were two articles for The Age in Melbourne and one for the Sydney Morning Herald, which were conducted by journalists that interviewed us prior to the project, and once we were on set. Our Associate Editor contact, Seamus Bradley, was instrumental behind these interviews, yet they were conducted by separate journalists on each occasion and included interviews with myself, Kate O'Toole and Gary Hoyer. I believe these articles demonstrated the validity of the research, our transparency and acted as a form of peer review. The articles can be read as Artefact 3.

5.3.7. The film itself

Whilst the production of *The Ballad of Des & Mo* is central to the research process, there was no reason to subject the film to a critical, textual analysis. This was because the film only needed to fulfil the UKFC's criteria of being a low or micro-budget feature film, which means that we would be comparable to the rest of their

data set. Despite being filmed in Melbourne, it would still qualify with 24 out of 35 points on the British Cultural Test⁸, the pass mark being 18 points.

Significantly, it was screened in front of an audience of approximately 450 people at the Australian Centre for Moving Image as part of the 59th Melbourne International Film Festival, which demonstrates its validity and serves as a form of peer review. Furthermore, the film was voted 9th in the Audience Awards out of over 300 films. This is determined by the individual audience members voting on a 10-point scale at the end of each movie and the festival calculating an average.

Finally, the film subsequently travelled to other international festivals, including Raindance in the UK, the Galway Film Fleadh in Ireland and the Irishfilmfesta in Italy. It is my belief that *The Ballad of Des & Mo* can work as a film by itself, demonstrating that the film had longevity and a context outside of Melbourne and the academic process. The film can be seen in Artefact 10.

These artefacts represent the data generated throughout the process of the research project. In the following chapter I will evaluate this data in an attempt to answer whether the PAR methodological approach has yielded a different perspective of low and micro-budget film production than the UKFC represented in their report.

⁸ <http://www.bfi.org.uk/supporting-uk-film/british-certification-tax-relief/cultural-test-film> (last accessed 17th July 2016)

6. Discussion

In Section 3.5. - Discussion I outlined the methodological approach taken to analyse and evaluate the data prior to this discussion. In summary, I collected the outputs from the PAR project and adopted a grounded theory methodology to code the data. I started with an intensive analysis of the shorter visual material (beginning with the Artefact 6) and then conducted extensive analysis across the data set to find examples that would reinforce or discredit emerging theories. In this discussion I will focus on three questions that will help to draw this thesis to a conclusion. The questions are:

- What themes emerge from the PAR outputs?
- Do the themes differ or relate to the UKFC report?
- Has the process been reliable?

I shall begin by providing the evidence to support the themes in the first instance, before widening the discussion later in the chapter.

6.1. What themes emerge from the PAR outputs?

Seven themes have been identified as a result of the grounded theory coding:

- 1) Roles are defined by the dominant model.
- 2) Experiencing pleasure in leisure and the development of a sporting analogy.
- 3) Drinking culture and the 'networking' pub.
- 4) Gender imbalance within production crew.
- 5) Pressure on direct and indirect friendships and relationships.
- 6) Fatigue.
- 7) Uncertain educational value.

These themes are not ordered in any systematic structure, such as quantity or significance. I have loosely structured them in order to flow from one point to another in order to prevent repetition.

6.1.1. Roles are defined by the dominant model

In one blog post written for Ted Hope (see Artefact 5 – specifically 3.1.), I outlined my attempts to alter the job titles when we tweaked the responsibilities of participants involved in the production. The new job titles were an attempt to distinguish that the responsibilities were different on our production due to the time constraints. However, it is evident these new titles did not work and were not adopted. Throughout the different artefacts, the traditional filmmaking roles (e.g., director, producer etc.) were referred to constantly. On television, radio and in print, Gary and I were always cited as the producer and director respectively. Despite an animatic section within the documentary explaining the different role titles, the rest of the documentary largely refers to the traditional titles throughout. In addition to this, the photographs illustrate how the apparatus and paraphernalia on the set are also adorned with the traditional titles (e.g., the log sheets and clapperboard have ‘director’ written on). It was not important to the production whether the new roles were adopted or not. I only offered them up as possible way of interpreting the challenges within the workflow of the project. However, it does have ramifications for the PAR research, which will be addressed later in this discussion. It is interesting to note that the existing terminology surrounding roles is so dominant that it carries meaning within popular culture such as television, radio or print. Directors are often a selling point for films as much as the cast, and so the term is familiar and used without explanation within the artefacts.



Image 1 The clapperboard with 'director' printed on it

6.1.2. Experiencing pleasure in leisure and the development of a sporting analogy.

In the documentary (Artefact 11) Gareth Nolan was uncertain as to why I would undertake the process after Galway:

GARETH NOLAN: Obviously, he enjoys it on some level. I guess in the same way that some people enjoy having themselves nailed to a cross, I don't really know.

(Artefact 11, 15:09)

It was "obvious" to Gareth that I would have to "enjoy" the process in order to consider doing it again, even if he could not distinguish what my precise enjoyment was. I had expressed my motivation within a presentation to the rest of the crew:

ME: What you're going to go through in the next few days is an incredible emotional experience. There's going to be some really big highs and some really deep lows. You need to open yourself up to that experience. You need to enjoy it, because it's gonna be over all too quickly.

(Artefact 11, 00:56)

ME: I'm incredibly excited, I'm incredibly nervous. I feel sometimes a little bit sick. But you know, that's what we're here for isn't it? We're here for an experience.

(Artefact 11, 01:37)

It is my belief that these participants were, like me, offering their free time in exchange for *an experience*. Not necessarily *work* experience (e.g., Gareth Nolan and Kate O'Toole are professionals who already have work); but an event that would leave a lasting impression on them. I expressed that there would be positive and negative values attached to the experience ("highs" and "lows") but that we would "need to enjoy it" (i.e. derive pleasure from the experience, whatever the experience itself may be). The promise to meet participant expectation of a pleasurable experience placed visible pressure on me as a project leader:

ME (voice cracking and near to tears): The pressure of it being a happy process, er you know, or the idea that we're all going to go away in some way and all be, er, best of friends when it is all done (grimaces)... fuck knows.

(Artefact 11, 17:08)

My concern was based on an assumption that the experience was central to everyone's reason for being on the project. For example, Andrew Brown referred to his own reason for participating:

ANDREW BROWN: I'm doing this massive, massive, biggest thing I've ever done, for pure, emotional satisfaction I think.

(Artefact 11, 16:10)

The pressure to deliver a positive experience is compounded by the fact that participants were devoting their free time to be involved in the project. Although there is no concrete evidence within the artefacts to demonstrate that all of

participants were volunteers, there is evidence that some were seeking this pleasure in their spare time:

GARETH NOLAN: I have to be in work on Tuesday.

(Artefact 11, 37:29)

“I have to be in work” implies this is *not* work. Therefore, we can assume this is Gareth’s leisure time, and that he derives pleasure from filmmaking in his spare time. These statements are evidence of a theme: filmmaking as a source of pleasure (something that we derive happiness from) and leisure (the use of our free time for enjoyment). This theme is also apparent through the development of a sporting analogy to encompass the sentiment. The process is referred to as “an extreme sport for nerds” (Gareth Nolan, Artefact 11, 40:28) and “a filmmaking bungee jump” (Mick Cahill, Artefact 11, 44:40). Furthermore, I use a soccer analogy when explaining the organisational structure of the crew (Artefact 11, 12:35).

This theme is also encapsulated within the Network Ten interview (Artefact 7) whereby Kate O’Toole states twice that she “enjoyed” the process (1:52 and again at 3:34) and that “digital filmmaking actually changes the rules of the game” (2:15), which is a common expression, but nevertheless one that evokes imagery of sport. I believe this evidence is significant as it reinforces the notion that this is *play* and *leisure*, not work. This differs from what the UKFC believed to be motivating factors for low and micro-budget filmmakers, which will be discussed in Section 6.2.1. – Similarities.

6.1.3. Drinking culture and the ‘networking’ pub

The reoccurring theme of drinking culture and the centrality of the public house within the process is perhaps an extension to the pleasurable, leisurely side of filmmaking. Aside from the reference in multiple artefacts that the project developed out of a “drunken bet” (Artefact 11, 57:30; Artefact 9, 11:35, Artefact 3.1.), there are numerous other references relating to drinking culture. Gary Hoctor believes the Melbourne opportunity arose from a screening of the Galway film in a

bar in Berlin (Artefact 8, 1:34). Andy Paton describes how he'll get "drunk and go home" at the end of the project (Artefact 11, 37:20) and I described how "I went and got pissed with Kate" at the end of the filming (Artefact 11, 51:40).

Aside from what is said, it is visible that the first crew meeting (Artefact 11, 4:05) is held in a subterranean bar and there are drinks on the table and in participants' hands. One of Andrew Brown's interviews (Artefact 11, 6:45) is conducted whilst he has a beer in his hand. We pass boxes of beer inside the rehearsal venue (Artefact 11, 10:33). However, none of the on set photographs or documentary scenes have any visible trace of alcohol consumption, which suggests that the culture *surrounds* the process but is not part of the filmmaking itself.

This is significant because the UKFC report makes no mention of a drinking culture, and yet it could have an impact upon the people who engage within low and micro-budget filmmaking. This will be discussed further in Section 6.2.2. – What differs?

6.1.4. Gender imbalance within production crew

Although we made an effort to have a gender balance on the screen⁹ (16 actors; eight of each gender) and within the documentarians (four; two of each) and photographers (two; one of each), only 31.5% of the production crew were female (18 out of 56) according to the production crew list. However, there is evidence throughout the artefacts to indicate that the females were marginalized on the production. Of the 397 photographs (Artefact 12) that were taken by Stephen Skok and Erminia Colucci, 299 included members of the crew. The gender imbalance and marginalization can be clearly identified when counting who appears in the images:

- 250 images are of male members of the crew only

⁹ Most artefacts made reference to Kate O'Toole's father, which is perhaps understandable given his contribution to cinema history. However, I did discuss with Kate how I felt uncomfortable having cast her and not her father that we should even find ourselves discussing it in interviews. Kate simply said that she was used to it. It was not included on our press releases.

- 18 images are of female members of the crew only
- 31 images include both male and female members of the crew.

Despite making up 31.5% of the production crew, women only appeared in a total of 16% of the images and only 6% by themselves (compared to 83% being images of men). Occasionally the gender bias was implied through speech on set also:

MIKE FISHER: I'm just a bit unhappy about on set stuff, so I'm gonna go talk to the fellas about it.

(Artefact 11, 24:30)

ME: Camera boys! Can you take it down to where John is there?

(Artefact 11, 47:25)

These statements are evidence of the fact that the “fellas” and the “boys” were the people given responsibility on set. In fairness to Gary Hootor, part of his frustration with the documentarians were that they had not interviewed the producing team of Olivia Clarke, Ann-Marie Brennan or Sarah Sweetnam, which may have provided a better gender representation. It is difficult to determine whether the women made a critical contribution to the project but were not properly represented in the artefacts, or if they were not given meaningful roles on the production which meant that they did not warrant the documentarians' or photographers' attention.

6.1.5. Pressure on direct and indirect friendships and relationships

In the Network Ten interview, Gary said that he would do the project again, but only on a bigger budget, before adding “my wife would second that too” (Artefact 7, 5:10). It is one of multiple references to the pressure that micro-budget filmmaking places on direct (within filmmaking) and indirect (outside of filmmaking) friendships and relationships. The documentary emphasizes this theme, largely through interviews where I reflected on the previous project:

ME: Ultimately the film was successful and it went down quite well, but I do think that it was at quite a large amount of personal cost to friendships and relationships.

(Artefact 11, 7:56)

I was later invited to expand on the situation:

ME (crying): We were just friends, you know. We were friends who were all really interested in cinema and we didn't really have a clue as to what we were doing, but the opportunity was too great. They offered us a stage on which to do something, and we threw ourselves into it, you know. We weren't not going to do it. We just said "yeah fine, we'll take it on". And really, everyone was just so far out of their depth, and er, I dunno, with everything else that was going on in our lives at the time, we just, perhaps, er, you know, put too much pressure on ourselves I think. And I think that was the worse thing about it, was that just through being friends and taking one another for granted too much, is what happened.

(Artefact 11, 33:55)

The "pressure" refers to the earlier quotation of it being a "happy process" (Artefact 11, 17:08), despite all the logistics that tend to be under-resourced yet need addressing on micro-budget productions. Despite being a pressure related to film production, the ramifications can still be felt away from the set. An interview with my parents gives their perspective:

STEPMUM: It's exhausting actually isn't it?

DAD: Yes it is. I guess it has a stress of its own on us, because obviously we want to see him succeed. And we have the faith that he will, as we've seen him do it before. But there's always that "Oh dear, should he put himself through this sort of pressure?" But that's what he thrives on.

(Artefact 11, 31:35)

Andrew Brown reinforced this argument with his anecdote of the problems that he was encountering at home. His speech was slurred and broken, suggesting that he was on the verge of cracking under pressure also:

ANDREW BROWN: My girlfriend's, like, hating me, cause I'm horrible to her. Erm, I'm just... erm. I just don't have much time and, erm... I'm not horrible to her, I'm just not communicative 'cause this is, I'm all drawn into this. Which is just a fucking film.

(Artefact 11, 33:01)

Gareth Nolan offered up his understanding of what the deal was meant to be for visiting Melbourne:

GARETH NOLAN (referring to Andy Paton): He told me a story the other night in the bar, that he was told the budget. They weren't even going to do it unless they had a hefty five-figure sum, that would entitle key role people to bring plus ones, for free, to Australia, and have a bit of a jolly really. He's now here, on his tod, and he'll be going back as soon as the last shot is cut.

(Artefact 11, 36:44)

Controversially, Gary's wife Olivia (Libby) Clarke was the only "plus one" invited to Melbourne to work on the crew, although there is no supporting evidence within the artefacts to validate this claim. This caused friction within the crew, as most had to share rooms with other crewmembers due to budgetary constraints. I believe that these examples collectively demonstrate that there is a theme of pressure on direct and indirect friendships and relationships as a result of micro-budget filmmaking.

6.1.6. Fatigue

One of the most repetitive themes is fatigue, perhaps unsurprisingly given the timeframe of the production.

ANDREW BROWN: When I get tired I can't focus very well.

(Artefact 11, 22:10)

MIKE FISHER: I think everyone is tired already, and some things can get lost in translation.

(Artefact 11, 27:26)

ME: I'm just really tired, sorry.

(Artefact 11, 33:48)

MICK CAHILL: I'm probably terminally tired, is what I am.

(Artefact 11, 38:30)

GARETH NOLAN: The worst bit about the last night is, you end up with the worst rushes because the crew are so tired. That punished us, as we were so tired, and we had to wait for it.

(Artefact 11, 52:05)

These quotes demonstrate that fatigue was widespread on the project, but Kate O'Toole believed that the exhaustion was not unique to our project, and in fact it is a common theme in all filmmaking:

KATE O'TOOLE: The downside of filmmaking is the amount of time that is wasted, and the amount of time that you spend hanging around doing absolutely nothing, waiting for set-ups to be completed and it's just insufferable. We talked about this at the premiere last night, but the joke is that actors are quite happy to do the acting in a film for free, they're just delighted to be acting. What you get paid for is the torture of hanging around doing absolutely nothing for 99% of the time. On this, we didn't do that; we just kept doing it, which was good. And it was no more or less exhausting than regular... All filmmaking is exhausting, however you do it, so in that regard, it is no different.

(Artefact 7, 3:33)

Kate evoked the imagery of suffering and torture within filmmaking, but both Gareth and Andrew preferred to use fatalistic hyperbole to describe our process:

ANDREW BROWN: It's impossible, yet possible, because we've done it, but at the expense of my brain. It's completely died.

(Artefact 11, 50:10)

GARETH NOLAN: The only way a 72-hour feature on RED could be made was with Mike on the team, and that's that. And now he is dead. Basically dead.

(Artefact 11, 53:20)

I believe *tiredness* is an understatement and *death* is an obvious overstatement, but I consider fatigue or exhaustion as appropriate terms for what was being discussed within these examples.

6.1.7. Uncertain educational value

BEDE McKENNA: Yeah, this is the first shoot I've ever been on. I expected to come in and sort of be, like, pushed to the side, as I don't really have any skills. So I thought I'd be pushed to the side and everyone's just like "get out of my way". I thought it would be really hectic and stuff. But you get here, people are teaching you things, they're showing you how to do stuff, they're letting you have some freedom and stuff and it is a good vibe. People aren't angry all of the time.

(Artefact 11, 41:21)

Bede's testament is interesting because he starts by referring specifically to himself before switching to "you" as opposed to "I". Can we infer from this that his experience is not exclusive to himself?

ME: I always use Bede as a really good example, cause Bede just came, he was a shadow, then ended up going off with the second unit and ended up

doing all the marking of all of their shots, like all of the clapperboard stuff. That's the flexibility that I'm talking about. If a job needs doing, walk in and do it. Don't just sit there and say, "well I'm not doing it, I don't even know how it works". He sort of turned round and said "what is it I need to do?" and then I never saw him without a clapperboard in his hand.

(Artefact 11, 41:45)

Again, whilst I use Bede as a model example and we see Alex Joseski teach Bede how to mark shots with a clapperboard (Artefact 11, 41:45), there are no other significant examples within the artefacts to suggest that this was primarily a *learning* experience for the crew, despite the fact that Gary saw it as being central to the project:

GARY HOCTOR: What kind of value are we giving as filmmakers? What kind of value are we giving to the people that participated in our project? And what monetary worth would you put on that experience? And I don't think people have put any monetary worth on it, but if they did, we'd like to think of it as an education as well for these people. So I think the model is somewhat sustainable, but the authorities, the funding bodies, from certain regions, need to recognise that. They need to recognise its potential that we're educating the youth of the industry and we're bettering their industry.

(Artefact 8, 9:45)

Unfortunately, without the participant SWOT analyses to help triangulate this theme, I do not believe with any certainty that this *was* a learning experience. It is difficult to determine whether Bede is *an* example or *the* example. In fact, I believe that the lack of participant enthusiasm for adopting new role titles and completing the SWOT analyses could suggest that this was *not* a substantial learning experience. Whilst I would like to believe there was some learning amongst the production crew, especially as it was a participatory research project, there is unfortunately no concrete evidence to suggest that learning was either widespread, or indeed significant. Furthermore, I believe that Gary's assertion about the authorities or funding bodies needing to recognise our "educating the youth of the

industry” is rhetoric. As well as assuming that it is a meaningful educational experience, it presumes that funding bodies would want industry entrants trained in such an unconventional way.

Having presented these themes, I shall now discuss them in relation to the UKFC report.

6.2. Do the themes differ or relate to the UKFC report?

As I used grounded theory as opposed to content analysis, I do not have direct comparisons that I can systematically contrast in relation to the UKFC report (i.e. I did not seek examples of their themes in our project). Therefore, I will now structure the discussion around which themes I believe to relate to their report and which themes differ. Ultimately, I believe that this will allow me to directly address the research question of whether the alternative methodology has presented a different perspective on low and micro-budget filmmaking.

6.2.1. Similarities

One of the criticisms within the rationale was that the UKFC report was written from the perspective of the industrial paradigm and only sought the opinions of writers, directors and producers within their data set. Interestingly, many of our artefacts can be accused of the same bias, especially the artefacts conducted with external media (Network Ten, RRR, The Age), which used the traditional role titles and only wished to interview the ‘key crew’. Whilst the documentary (Artefact 11) does include opinions from elsewhere in the production and some exploration of the different titles, I was one of the central protagonists of the film and most crew were referred to using traditional titles. This would not be interesting had it not been for our deliberate attempt to distance our taxonomy of roles away from the dominant model used by industry (and reflected in the UKFC report). Why did our project end up using the same terminology and adopting the same structure? The roles had initially been altered in an attempt to address the PAR approach to

positionality (see 4.3. – Self Reconnaissance). There may be simple explanations as to why they were not adopted:

- Perhaps my role titles were not particularly catchy or memorable,
- The participants did not devise the titles, so perhaps they saw no reason or necessity to adopt them.
- Perhaps they were not meaningfully promoted.

The UKFC report (2008, p.21) argued that “the precise motivations of filmmakers are individual and various” yet created three “generic categories” of filmmaker motivations to participate in low and micro-budget filmmaking:

- Filmmakers who are aware of the “current, dominant value chain, market and strategic situation of the UK film industry – and of their position in relationship to those environmental factors”
- Filmmakers who “regard the process as a learning experience almost regardless of the outcome of their film, and value outcomes in terms of knowledge gained and lessons learned about the film industry and film production”
- Filmmakers who “feel themselves to be unsupported by (or even oppositional to) to mainstream industry and often (arguably invariably) the network of strategic agencies in the UK.”

The first two groups would be motivated to mimic industry titles as they wish to either operate in industry or learn about industry. I would probably belong in the third category, but the rest of the crew may well have had different motivations that led them to operate under the traditional model. It is difficult to determine whether the motivation to mimic traditional roles in our project was *functional* (the need to organise quickly meant reverting to an established infrastructure), *educational* (the desire to learn about the industry roles) or *vocational*, so participants could gain similar roles in future (e.g., gaining credits that can act as a way of getting future employment in the film industry).

GARY HOCTOR: I think what we’ve done this time round in Melbourne, is allow people who have great knowledge of film in every strata of the

trade, we've allowed them to participate on this feature film and get a credit at an international festival.

(Artefact 8, 3:23)

Gary believed that it was the industry credit that motivated the crew to be involved, which would explain why the traditional roles needed to be adopted. For example, the Internet Movie Database (IMDb.com) is widely considered to be the industry record of *who* has made *what* (i.e. a register of credits), and the roles on the database are fixed to the dominant model's taxonomy. If participants were looking to get credits, they would need them to be in established roles that are recognised by industry. However, there is no other evidence to suggest that this was the motivation of the cast or crew. Kate O'Toole said that her involvement was due to "believing in the concept behind it" (Artefact 7, 2:09). Andrew Brown said he was doing it for "emotional satisfaction" (Artefact 11, 16:10) and would *not* be seeking to do his role again:

ANDREW BROWN: It's over now. I don't regret it, but I'll never do it again. I think I'll go into documentary or something. No, like, but, it's not because it's me, it's because of this role I've got.

(Artefact 11, 50:00)

Gary Hocter also cited the example of three "girls" who had been working with us on the team in the run up to Melbourne:

GARY HOCTOR: For over a year now, five of us have been working on this project. Three girls: Libby, Ann-Marie and Sarah have been working hard with us for over a year and they're a civil servant, an account and a retail manager.

(Artefact 8, 12:10)

This evidence would suggest that the traditional roles were *not* adopted because of the credit attached to them in the hope of progressing in the industry. As we had a crew of "people who have great knowledge of film in every strata of the trade" (Gary Hocter, Artefact 8, 3:23), we can assume that the motivation was not

educational either. So why adopt them when an alternative was available? I believe that it was *functional* to adopt the existing titles, as they are so dominant that altering them would take a much longer period of production. Our crew were already familiar with the existing structure and it was simpler to adopt it. In reality, I believe there was probably a mixture of motivations on the production and it was beneficial for the majority, regardless of motivation, to adopt the traditional titles.

Traditional roles aside momentarily, I believe that the evidence of ‘pleasure and leisure’ (see Section 6.1.2) and the additional ‘non-filmmakers’ (e.g., Olivia, Sarah and Ann-Marie) participating in the crew, suggest that is possible to add a fourth category to the UKFC’s previous three:

- Filmmakers (some of which may not identify themselves as filmmakers at all) who enjoy the process simply for an experience, and not necessarily an educational one.

This perspective is not addressed within the three UKFC’s generic categories, although in the conclusion they did envisage “a group of friends joining together to make a film for the experience and out of mutual enthusiasm and therefore taking (and expecting) little or no payment during production” (UKFC, 2008, p.53). I believe our project could fit within this description, especially as the UKFC did not assert that it had to be an educational experience.

However, it is within this fourth kind of context, where participant motivation may be different from the original three UKFC generic categories, that I believe that the traditional titles and roles may not be appropriate as they connote responsibilities and behaviours that belong to the dominant filmmaking model.

KYLE EVANS: Who do I need to talk to about getting a runner down to pick up the mic’ up off of Kate?

ANDREW BROWN: Um, me. Where are the runners?

[Kyle looks around and addresses someone off screen]

KYLE EVANS: Er... are you a runner?

SOMEONE OFFSCREEN: No.

(Artefact 11, 22:51)

A ‘runner’ is a colloquial term on film sets for a production assistant, the entry-level position within the traditional hierarchy. In the USA the production assistant is called a ‘gofer’, a linguistic simplification of ‘go for’, which refers to their primary role of fetching things for superiors. I assume that ‘runner’ is meant to refer to fetching things *quickly*. In our project I requested that these roles had slightly different responsibilities and were referred to as ‘shadows’ (13:00, Artefact 11), as I believe ‘shadowing’ has an existing connotation of educational development and on-the-job learning. A ‘shadow’ would be a generalist who could work alongside specialists and turn their hand to what needed to be done, perhaps with a little training on the job. However, these roles became synonymous with ‘runners’ and they began to be treated as such on the production. This reinforces my earlier assertion that it may not have been an educational experience for these participants.

The confusion around job titles is most evident with regard to Andrew Brown, who got caught up in the semantics of his role:

ANDREW BROWN: Assistant director, or director’s assistant as James is calling it, is a mind-blower.

(Artefact 11, 50:27)

The title I had actually given Andrew was Project Leader’s Assistant (see Fig. 4 in Chapter 4 – Reconnaissance), but he was constantly referred to by others as the director’s assistant, which soon became conflated with an Assistant Director (AD), a title with a very different and specific role on a film set.

MIKE FISHER (to ANDREW BROWN): If I were you, I would be going “alright then, this is my fucking (his sentence aborts). I’m the AD, this is my floor right? I’m fucking running the show.” Get somebody, get a runner, whatever, to do, um... make the log notes.

(Artefact 11, 25:40)

This is an example of the traditional roles being adopted to serve a *function*, in this case: order on set. It is an AD’s responsibility to track progress against the production schedule and prepare daily call sheets, but most importantly maintain

order by ‘calling the roll’; calling out a series of specific cues for each take to ensure that all cast and crew on set are aware of exactly what is going on so they can perform their particular role at the appropriate moment (e.g., “Quiet on set”, “Final checks” etc.). In contrast, the director’s assistant is a traditional (yet increasingly uncommon) role, who essentially shadows the director and learns their craft by helping with tasks when required. The Assistant Director¹⁰ is an authoritative manager on the set, “running the show” as Mike suggested, the bad cop to a director’s good cop.

Furthermore, Mike’s statement “Get somebody, get a runner, whatever” is evidence of the traditionally dismissive attitude towards ‘runners’, and could be interpreted as a hierarchy in itself:

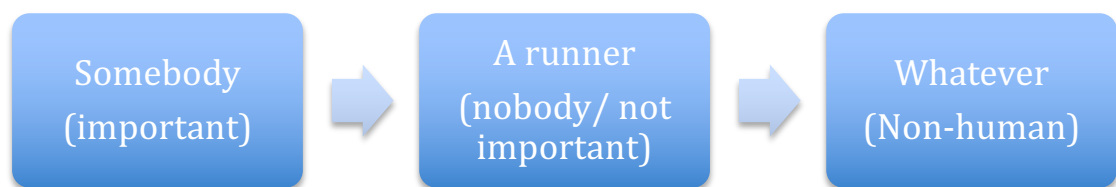


Figure 6 Possible interpretation of runners on set

I believe that by adopting the traditional titles, one begins to adopt the hierarchical attitude that goes with such nomenclature. Traditional roles operate in an industrial space where the motivation is sometimes extrinsic (i.e. pay) as opposed to a space where the motivation to take part is often intrinsic (e.g., learning or fun). Bechky’s research supports this:

One’s ability to ‘make’ and ‘get’ jokes can establish an individual’s place in the status hierarchy... When individuals such as the locations assistant or the set dresser, for instance, were asked to perform a task that they did not consider part of their roles, they would scoff, ‘Do you think I am a PA?’ Doing so clearly and publicly demarcated the tasks that were considered by

¹⁰ I deliberately chose not to have an AD in Melbourne after an experience in Galway whereby the assistant director once woke everyone up in the morning by banging a saucepan as a makeshift alarm clock. The crew of volunteers who had already got up (and the volunteers who were still entitled to sleep, as it was not yet their shift) did not appreciate the literal rude awakening.

the crew to be beneath everyone except for those in the lowest status role, the production assistants.

(Bechky, 2006, p.13)

Furthermore, adopting the traditional hierarchy is not in the spirit of PAR. Fetching things for your superior is a form of exploitation, not emancipation. Due to timescale and logistics, the crew was never offered the opportunity to devise roles and titles for themselves (which would be an excellent PAR exercise). Whilst the lack of time to democratically decide a new model could be considered to be a flaw of our participatory research methodology, the decision to adopt the traditional titles could also be considered a *result* of the methodology; the old roles may have been adopted democratically to address a need for order, as opposed to my dictatorial suggestions. Perhaps the reliance on old roles was inevitable, as Bechky (2006, p.15) argued that roles are a stabilizing force in temporary organisations where longstanding relationships do not exist. Regardless of motivation, by adopting the traditional titles (director, assistant director and runner etc.), we were demonstrating that low and micro-budget film *does* follow in the footsteps of industry and attempts to emulate it, for better or worse.

It is difficult to determine whether this imitation of industry roles leads to a further similarity: gender imbalance. The gender split of production crew on the 2,000 highest grossing U.S. box office films between 1994-2013 was 77.4% male to 22.6% female (Follows, 2014, p.2), whereas we were 68.5% male to 31.5% female. The UKFC report did not examine the gender balance of entire production crews on low and micro-budget productions, but they did state that low and micro-budget productions had a higher percentage of female directors than mainstream productions (UKFC, 2008, p15). As mentioned in Section 6.1.4., women were marginalised within our production, which again, is similar to the pattern in industry. In the U.S. box office's 2000 highest grossing films between 1994-2013, the key creative roles (i.e. producers, production designers, editors, writers, cinematographers, directors and composers) had a gender split that was at best 80.3% male (producers) and at worst 98.2% male (cinematographers), and only costume designers and casting directors were predominantly female (Follows, 2014, p.4). In this regard, our project was not demonstrating any significant

difference to the patterns that had emerged in the UKFC report, which is disappointing. Although our project correlates with the UKFC's use of the dominant model and observations on gender imbalance, there is no evidence within our project to suggest that the dominant model was the *cause* of such disparity in gender, as recruitment had taken place before roles were assigned as opposed to the other way around. Grugulis and Stoyanova (2012) asserted that the structural organisation of the dominant model, specifically its reliance on hiring from existing networks instead of transparent recruitment policies, does favour men, and excludes women and minorities. We did not recruit in the same way as traditional productions, but our imbalance may be due to the wider industrial imbalance (e.g., women did not come forward to participate as they assumed we would also have imbalance) or our own structural procedure¹¹ (e.g., asserting what skills you believe you possess or just 'helping out' where needed may be a dynamic that favours men more than women).

The third commonality between our project and the UKFC report is the fatigue, specifically as a result of the long hours. The report noted that low and micro-budget films "are typically produced by working long hours over a short period" (UKFC, 2008, p.18). Our project would definitely fall into that category. Other academic literature suggests that long hours are common within the UK industry, usually as a result of widespread low budgets:

The average length of the working day over the past year was 12.1 hours. The length of the shooting day (that is the duration of actual filming, excluding any preparation and de-rigging) has been progressively increased by production companies. The financial pressures placed upon UK production companies by the relatively small budgets that they work with mean that the length of the working day and week has been increased as a

¹¹ In a later project that I operated with a similar recruitment procedure, it was noticeable how male applicants would specify the roles in which they would like to be considered, whereas female applicants would indicate that they were simply happy to be involved. As a result, the gender balance was better but the marginalization was not. Unfortunately, I did not securely record the original crew recruitment material from Melbourne that would have outlined their preferences. It was destroyed by a member of the production team as part of wider data protection (it included numbers and addresses). This data would have been illuminating for the thesis.

means of maximizing resources paid for on a weekly basis (such as equipment hire).

(Blair et al., 2001, p.178)

There seems little point in further discussion of this factor, as all evidence suggests that this is common (rightly or wrongly) within film production. Obviously the similarities between our project and the UKFC's report reinforce the 'comprehensive picture' the UKFC originally portrayed. In the following section, I will examine the differences, with an aim to portray a different perspective.

6.2.2. What differs?

The significant evidence of a drinking culture (see Section 6.1.3.) on our project could be dismissed as unique to us as opposed to being a common phenomenon overlooked by the UKFC in their report. Whilst the drinking culture is not explored in wider literature, it is interesting to note that Shooting People¹², an online independent filmmaking community, hold regular events on the first Monday of every month in 19 cities across the UK (and one in New York, USA) and call the event 'Shooters in the Pub'. The UKFC report made no mention of this organization or its events, despite Shooting People being established in 1998 and having over 45000 members (Independent Filmmakers Network, 2016). It is possible to look at the public photo albums of major British cinema events such as the Edinburgh Film Festival, and see the prevalence of alcohol, especially at sponsored receptions and networking nights¹³¹⁴. Therefore, I do not believe that the 'pub culture' in our project differs from what the UKFC report *might* have reported. However, was the 'pub culture' significant to our project and would it be so in others (i.e. worth addressing in the UKFC report)?

¹² www.shootingpeople.org (last accessed on August 20th 2016)

¹³ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/edfilmfest/albums>. (last accessed on January 3rd 2017)

¹⁴ Pictures of the UKFC's own "Short Filmmakers' drinks night" in 2009 is at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/edfilmfest/albums/72157620442683697> (last accessed 3rd January 2017).

The evidence from our project suggests that significant activities relating to the film production, such as rehearsals and crew meetings, were taking place in bars and pubs because they were available as a communal space, fundamental to networking and collaborating in teams. These are elements that need to take place in all filmmaking, so it would be significant to know where such activities take place. The UKFC report does not meaningfully identify any location where the filmmaking activities take place other than two references to ‘bedroom’ filmmaking (UKFC, 2008, p.27 and p.54), an allusion to ‘bedroom’ musicians who record and distribute music from their own homes. The absence of any specificity in the UKFC report regarding where production activity takes place suggests that it was either not considered, or it was assumed. Either way, it would have been interesting to understand where the UKFC envisaged the varying types of filmmaking activity took place. It is particularly surprising that the UKFC did not address where the films were actually being shot, as the ‘industry’ sometimes films in studio environments but independent movies rarely do. It is also important with regard to activities like networking or production meetings because some locations may not be as encouraging for diversity (e.g., people who may not drink alcohol for whatever reason, may wish to avoid situations where alcohol is present). Gornostaeva (2009) explored the ‘negotiation heavy’ interactions of television and film production companies within all stages of production (from development to distribution) within the spaces around Camden, and the importance of being in the places and spaces where the rest of the creative community takes place in order to seize opportunities. In the UKFC’s defense, this research was published *after* the UKFC report was released (and in the Geographical Review, as opposed to a film publication).

There are examples within wider literature that acknowledge production crews spend a lot of time together working and socializing (Bechky, 2006, p.15; Rowlands and Handy, 2012, p.669), but none specified the exact nature of the socializing. The UKFC report does not explore the precise social nature of filmmaking either, which is problematic because sociability is subjective dependent on culture (e.g., our drinking could have been perceived as *unsociable* to others, and they may have subsequently felt excluded from participating). The absence of information about the places in which participants interact, and the ways in which they interact within

those spaces, diminishes the UKFC's 'comprehensive picture'. To use a filmmaking analogy; it is like writing a script but forgetting to include where the scenes take place.

Table 4 Terms used in the UKFC report and the frequency of their use

Term used:	Number of times used:
Friends	2
Family	1
Relationship	3
Contact	2 (although only once referring to personal contacts, the other referred to 'there was no contact details for unnamed producer')
Social	7 (although 3 times referring to social networking as a distribution platform, 3 times referring to social realism as a genre, and once referring to the social impact of film on audiences).
Hobby	0
Pastime	0
Leisure	0
Pleasure	0
Fun	0
Amateur	0
Professional	11
Community	0
Collective	0
Volunteer	1 (in the context of who volunteered information on download sales)
Business	55
Sales	54
Funding	46
Money	12
Profit	3
Employment	6
Job/Jobs	4
Learning	10
Training	21

As Table 4 demonstrates, the emphasis in the UKFC report was significantly upon filmmaking as either a monetary, transactional culture or a training/learning venture. It represents a failure to appreciate micro-budget filmmaking as an amateur pursuit, where participants (some of whom do not identify themselves as

filmmakers) offer their free time to enjoy an experience (leisure). There were two points at which filmmaking was vaguely identified and alluded to as a leisurely pursuit: picking up a guitar (UKFC, 2008, p.54) and playing in pub band (UKFC, 2008, p.22). Neither example is pursued, and both are in the context of being ‘discovered’, which is not strictly leisure, rather than an investment in your future reputation. The UKFC’s decision to neglect filmmaking as a leisurely pursuit is unusual, given that there is a significant volume of literature regarding amateur filmmaking (filmmakers who do not make a living from filmmaking but produce films in their spare time) within film studies as a discipline. There are also examples of fan filmmaking such as *Raiders of The Lost Ark: The Adaptation* (1989), a shot for shot imitation of the original 1981 movie (admittedly these productions may be driven by a passion for the film *subject* as opposed to the love of the production process). However, there are plenty of examples of short 48-hour filmmaking challenges that all focus on the leisurely pursuit of filmmaking, regardless of the films subject, but the UKFC would not have captured these within their data set as they tend to be short films. Our example of shooting a feature-length movie in 72 hours was unusual, hence the interest from Melbourne International Film Festival in our project.

A further problem with not understanding the social pursuit of filmmaking is that the UKFC never questioned why people would make films in their spare time. The automatic assumption was that people were doing it to be discovered by industry. The UKFC never considered that people could possibly feel detached from the films that were offered in the mainstream and sought to make things that resonated more closely with their own lives.

NETWORK TEN INTERVIEWER: Do you think a 72-hour film is inferior in quality to one that has taken a year or two years?

KATE O’TOOLE: No. God no. You look at some of the stuff that is coming out of Hollywood, especially the huge budget stuff, it’s just dreadful.

(Artefact 7, 3:00)

The fact that our film was voted into the Audience Top Ten in Melbourne demonstrates that audiences can find other qualities in films other than special

effects, 3D or surround sound. I believe our film tapped into alternative qualities that appeal to audiences: the recognition of their local spaces on a big screen, the sense that something was made locally, the idea that this is ‘hot off the press’. Schmidt and Cohen (2013, p.180) believed that “Western companies and governments will not be the ones to develop the bulk of the new content. The best solutions will be hyper-local, designed and supported by people with intimate knowledge of the immediate environment.” This is about understanding the places and spaces in which films are made, and the UKFC’s inability to recognise such trends emerging meant that they were ill equipped to develop policy in such areas.

Perhaps the UKFC assumed that by focusing on feature-length movies, the filmmakers would all be working within industrial parameters and looking to sell their film: that feature films represent the ‘business end’ of filmmaking whereas short film is for the enthusiasts. Our project demonstrates that such an assumption would be incorrect. It could be argued that our project was made after the report was written, and maybe there were no examples like ours in their data set. Except my first feature film *Peppermint* *was* in their data set, and there was an example within the production whereby a friend’s work colleagues from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) set decorated an entire flat in exchange for pizza, to help us out and do something different in their weekend. It may be that such instances were rare ‘outliers’ and could not be synthesized or represented within the final report: in which case, the report cannot be considered ‘comprehensive’ without demonstrating the range and not just the modal average. In fairness to the UKFC, there is no meaningful or significant literature written about feature filmmaking specifically as a social pursuit. This would be a possible area for future research, and I believe forms part of the original knowledge developed within this thesis.

There is no meaningful examination within the UKFC report as to how social interactions work within low and micro-budget filmmaking aside from the one reference about ‘friends’ getting together to make a film (UKFC, 2008, p.53). The evidence that low and micro-budget filmmaking places pressure on friendships and relationships both inside and outside of the filmmaking process is absent from the UKFC report. In fact, the report places little importance on the value of social

interactions within *any* strata of filmmaking, such as how friendships work, or the value of reputation, let alone any impact it may have on other family members. There are only three occasions where the word ‘relationship’ is used at all, and only once is it in the context of their importance to filmmaking:

One of the benefits of the Warp X approach over and above making one-off low budget features is that Warp X has been able to form strong, lasting relationships with sales agents and other industry sectors, building trust in the brand and the product.

(UKFC, 2008, p.39)

This lack of emphasis on relationships is disappointing as there is plenty of literature pre-dating the UKFC report to suggest that relationships are fundamental to filmmaking given the structure of the industry (Blair, 2001; Menger, 1999; Starkey et al., 2000; Bechky, 2006 to name a few). Perhaps it was the existing literature, or that it was perceived as common knowledge, that meant the UKFC did not see a reason to examine the value of relationships in a low or micro-budget context. This is a shame, as all of the existing literature focused on the interactions that occur within industrial models of filmmaking, and the UKFC report had the potential to identify how this related to low and micro-budget filmmaking. Even literature that explicitly addressed the pressures placed on relationships inside and outside of filmmaking, still focused on the industrial context and never on a low or micro-budget one. This literature explored topics such as the role of relationships with temporary organisations (Bechky, 2006), how social capital is used within filmmaking (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012), and how the structural conditions of project-based labour within the film industry impact on financial, creative, social and emotional rewards of employment (Rowlands and Handy, 2012).

Bechky (2006) has described the pressure cooker creative environment of filmmaking as a temporary ‘total institution’ in which workers are removed from their normal surroundings and thrust into a cloistered, intense world where they work and socialize exclusively with members of the same project for weeks or months.

(Rowlands and Handy, 2012, p.669)

The notion of a ‘total institution’, whereby filmmakers’ work and play alongside one another yet exclude others during the intensity of production, mirrors our experience on the project. Andrew Brown’s relationship problems were because he was “all drawn into this” (Artefact 11, 33:01). My dad said, “we’ve sent him a text and an email, but we haven’t had any reply” (Artefact 11, 30:35) and “we don’t want to interrupt and we don’t want to get in his way” (Artefact 11, 32:00). I believe this is evidence of our exclusion of others outside of filmmaking whilst we were in production.

In practical terms it had the effect of making outside relationships, family life and friendships hard to sustain and colleagues were more dependent on one another for society as well as a successful project outcome.

(Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012, p.1317)

In this regard, I believe our evidence of micro-budget production correlates with the wider research into industry as a whole, but it is missing from the UKFC report. However, I cannot identify any literature that focuses specifically on low and micro-budget filmmaking and the impacts that it may have on social circumstances when money is less likely to be involved. This is an area that would benefit from further research, as I believe that relationships alter when intrinsic motivation drives the individual as opposed to extrinsic (e.g.; the individual may be perceived as *wanting* to put pressure on relationships by *choice*, as opposed to *having* to through *need*). There is also potential to research when money *is* involved in low and micro-budget filmmaking, specifically when filmmakers are calling on their families and friends as part of a crowdfunding campaign. Incidentally, the UKFC report contained no references to crowdfunding campaigns (which became a huge component of low and micro-budget filmmaking) as it was a nascent technology at the time of the report’s publication and probably was not used on any of the data set examples. Had they explored crowdfunding, there would have most likely been some question about the value of relationships and networks.

The UKFC report places a significant emphasis on low and micro-budget filmmaking as a tool for training and learning, and that it helps filmmakers ‘progress’ in industry.

For many, the main value of the sector was that it offered opportunities for talent in all departments and grades to progress within the industry.

(UKFC, 2008, p.4)

The evidence was not conclusive on our project that it was an educational experience for most of the crew (whilst there was an example of it, it could not be triangulated), and whilst we do not have evidence of whether it has subsequently helped participants’ progress in industry, there is Andrew Brown’s example that he will “never do it again” (Artefact 11, 50:00). Our evidence is supported by wider literature that questions whether ‘on-the-job’ learning really occurs on film productions:

Instead of training, supervision, and formal rules and hierarchy, temporary organizations rely on short-term workers with the requisite ability and experience to perform the tasks assigned to them.

(Bechky, 2006, p.4)

“Requisite ability and experience” does not suggest the *progression* that the UKFC reported. Gary Hootor acknowledged that we had “people who have great knowledge of film in every strata of the trade” (Artefact 8, 3:23), which suggests that our crew also had the requisite ability and experience. Grugulis and Stoyanova (2011, p.344) use the term ‘stretchwork’ to refer to a process whereby an individual’s skills are improved by combining tasks that challenge them with ones they could do. They argued that it was absent within freelance labour markets, part of a phenomenon they termed ‘the missing middle’ within a community of practice (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2011).

Most of the tensions arose because of the mismatch between the mundane administrative tasks they were assigned and the developmental jobs (‘stretchwork’) that would facilitate further careers in the industry.

(Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2011, p.344)

This was my primary concern when creating the role for ‘shadows’. I believed that it had to be an educational experience, whereas ‘runners’ end up fetching things, which is a mundane task. My belief in a shadow system was informed by Blair’s assertion that:

Members of departments again have a degree of method autonomy with, for example, people having their own systems for doing jobs and imposing those requirements on those working beneath them... this also forms something approximating an informal apprenticeship system where trainees are initiated, socialized and taught ‘the way things are done’ in addition to technical skills.

(Blair, 2001, p.164)

It is possible to reinterpret Mike Fisher’s advice to Andrew Brown in this context, and actually reread it as a form of educational advice:

MIKE FISHER (to ANDREW BROWN): If I were you, I would be going “alright then, this is my fucking (his sentence aborts). I’m the AD, this is my floor right? I’m fucking running the show.” Get somebody, get a runner, whatever, to do, um... make the log notes.

(Artefact 11, 25:40)

This could be interpreted as a form of training, whereby Andrew is being taught ‘how it should be done’. We could assume that Mike’s approach is the one that the UKFC had in mind when saying that low and micro-budget filmmaking is valuable training for people in industry. Personally, I interpret Mike’s advice as a veiled order¹⁵, but it depends on one’s interpretation of ‘training’. The fundamental problem is that training someone on ‘how something is done’ within an industrial

¹⁵ In this specific circumstance, part of the problem (aside from the advice to give the mundane task of log notes to a runner) was that Andrew was not working under Mike, he was working under me, and I had already assigned a way for Andrew to work. Mike had the autonomy to manage his own post-production team in a way that he saw fit but did not have control over how we would work on set, which was my responsibility.

context assumes that circumstances are the same in a low and micro-budget one. It is only meaningful training if the situations were like for like, and that low and micro-budget filmmaking operates in the same way that industry does. Paul Harris mentioned Roger Corman (Artefact 8, 13:15), an American producer who launched the careers of directors like Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Ron Howard and James Cameron. Corman is renowned for producing low budget exploitation B-movies that have questionable artistic merit but still turn profit. The common belief is that a micro-budget apprenticeship under him means that you can learn the skills of the trade and go into industry. It is a powerful narrative, but are we training people in cutting corners so that they can carry that skill forward? Or are we taking industry models and scaling them down to train good practice? It may well be that we are training people that factors such as exploitative workloads and gender-imbalance are acceptable, and they continue to work in such ways once they have *progressed* into industry. It is difficult to determine the causality within this situation; whether the training is informing the way in which people work in industry, or whether industry is informing the way in which people are being trained. Either way, there is a real contradiction at the heart of the UKFC's assertion that:

Real innovation and entrepreneurship on the part of producers will be needed to develop new business models and opportunities.

(UKFC, 2008, p.28)

If the training imitates the practice of industry, how did the UKFC imagine real innovation and entrepreneurship would take place? To innovate is to change, alter, transform. Training assumes that something has gone before and is being learnt, copied, and followed. By emphasizing training and learning as opposed to innovation and entrepreneurship, the UKFC placed low and micro-budget filmmaking as something that *fed* industry as opposed to *led* industry. This was perhaps a missed opportunity, as less money carries less risk. Policy on micro-budget filmmaking as innovation as opposed to training could be a possible area of future research. With regards to our project, I am still unconvinced that it was an educational experience, but I am certain that it was not an example of industry training.

Finally, the UKFC made four musical analogies within the report (2008, p.4; p.22; p.27; p.54), drawing parallels to filmmaking in two different ways. Three of the analogies believed that low and micro-budget filmmakers could self-distribute in the same way that musicians do, whilst the second analogy was that:

Low budget filmmakers make films because they can. They make movies because they want to, in the same way that people play music in pubs.

(UKFC, 2008, p.22)

Whilst I do not disagree with these analogies, it is interesting that our project included no musical analogies and four sporting ones. What could be the reason for this? Out of context it could be argued that both sporting and musical analogies revolve around the concept of ‘play’ (i.e. one plays music, one plays sports), which could reinforce my earlier assertion about filmmaking as a form of leisure. However, this discounts what the analogies were being used to represent, and in the UKFC report, three musical analogies were for the sake of understanding business models, and one was to understand motivation. Within our project, “an extreme sport for nerds” (Gareth Nolan, Artefact 11, 40:28) and “a filmmaking bungee jump” (Mick Cahill, Artefact 11, 44:40) refers to experiences and sensations, whilst my soccer analogy referred to organisational structure of the crew (Artefact 11, 12:35) and Kate O’Toole’s “rules of the game” (Artefact 7, 2:15) refers to business practices. It is tenuous to link all of these together and suggest that these topics represent ‘play’. I believe that it is not the analogies used, or what they represent, that is most interesting; it is who is using them. Each of the musical analogies in the UKFC report were used by people with existing positions within industry as opposed to low or micro-budget filmmakers themselves. I believe that we may have subconsciously used sporting analogies due to the constant sensation that one is being pitted *against* something: yourself, the elements, budget. I believe that our analogies were probably influenced by the inevitable sense of a ‘race against time’ within our production. Musical analogies do not capture this adversarial sense. However, although the analogies are different, I believe that this adversarial sense is captured elsewhere within the UKFC report; therefore, these different analogies do not highlight a different perspective.

6.2.3. Summary of thematic discussion

It is possible to arrange these findings into three categories: themes that correlated with the UKFC report, themes that were not in the UKFC report but could be found within wider literature, themes not in the UKFC report or in wider literature.

Table 5 Summary of findings

Themes that correlated with the UKFC report	Traditional role titles, gender imbalance, fatigue from long working hours, the adversarial sense within low and micro-budget filmmaking.
Themes that were not in the UKFC report but could be found within wider literature	Pressure on personal life, the ‘total institution’ of work and socializing within filmmaking, feature filmmaking as a social pursuit, the spaces in which low and micro-budget filmmaking takes place.
Themes not in the UKFC report or in wider literature	-

Table 5 demonstrates that there are a significant number of themes that were not included within the UKFC report that could be found elsewhere. The project generated no themes that could not be found elsewhere. Whilst this was initially disappointing, the validity of the project is reinforced due to the correlation to other examples, which is positive. Furthermore, there are examples where the literature only refers to industrial contexts of filmmaking, and by discovering similar themes within low and micro-budget filmmaking, there can be considered to be an original contribution to knowledge. Therefore, three conclusions can be drawn from this summary:

- That the UKFC report was *not* a ‘comprehensive picture’ of low and micro-budget film production.
- A different methodology *does* present a different perspective of low and micro-budget film production.
- Original contributions to knowledge can be identified as a result of this study.

These will be expanded upon in Chapter 7 – Conclusion. But firstly, how reliable can these results be, given the methodological problems that were encountered?

6.3. Has the process been reliable?

Earlier in this thesis, one of my key arguments for why the UKFC report was unreliable was that the various voices from across the production crew had not been considered, only the views of writers, producers and directors. This was an important factor when choosing a methodology to examine low and micro-budget filmmaking, as I felt that a ‘comprehensive picture’ could not be achieved without their contributions.

Whom is the film “by”? Spend a day on the set and you learn. It is by everyone who worked on it.

(Mamet, 2007, p.7)

Getting this crew perspective, as part of an over-arching desire to be critical of existing power structures, was central to my decision to adopt a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology. In retrospect, I could have conducted semi-structured interviews with some low and micro-budget film crew and taken the grounded theory approach to their responses, instead of having to make a whole feature and the stress and uncertainty of the PAR process. However, I felt studies had taken similar approaches in the past (albeit from different disciplines and on larger-budget productions) and that there would be no guarantee that this would result in an original contribution to knowledge. The logic was: by choosing the PAR methodology, I was exploring a different approach to researching film, regardless of whether it would result in a different outcome from the UKFC report (which it ultimately did). I think this desire to be different was fuelled by an uncertainty of what was expected from me in this process, and my naivety and enthusiasm led me to underestimate the scale and scope of what I finally became involved in. Perhaps the conclusions that I have reached could have been achieved by much simpler methodologies than the Action Research approach, and with clearer, easily defended robustness. I believe that the failure of the participant SWOT analysis

limited my ability to achieve my objective of getting an all-inclusive perspective from the crew. Similarly, the documentary had some perspectives from the crew, but it was largely centered on my involvement, and other artefacts were similar to the UKFC report: the director and the producer, sometimes with the lead actor. However, the fact that some other participants are heard and seen means I do not believe that it renders the project *unreliable*. Ultimately, I believe that the findings of the thesis are sound due to the various artefacts and methodologies employed to triangulate the evidence.

Would the project have been more reliable if it had adopted a PV methodology as opposed to PAR? It is difficult to speculate, as PV probably has unexpected challenges that would impact upon the findings in similar or different ways. What would have happened had the crew attempted to organise themselves as opposed to me doing it? Personally, I do not believe the gender imbalance we experienced would have corrected itself without some affirmative action on behalf of the facilitator, as the natural inclination elsewhere on the project was to mimic industry practice, not challenge it. This was most likely because of our focus on product as opposed to process, which Botes and Van Rensburg (2000, p.50) identified as a common tension between the cost of time versus the value of debate and agreement upon participatory projects. I understand this to be the distinction between PV and Participatory Cinema, whereby the emphasis gets placed on different imperatives. As our project already had the product of a feature film that could fit within the UKFC dataset in mind, it then informed all judgements subsequently. Had the emphasis been on participating together on process and product, like a true PV project, the outcome would perhaps have been different and might not have resulted in a film that fits the UKFC dataset.

I believe that the decision to abandon the emancipatory objective influenced our project. It would have been possible to structure and facilitate a PV or PAR processes differently to have improved the involvement of women and marginalised groups (e.g., gender balance of crew to be proportionally reflected in the key roles and technical operation). As it was, we were not even focused on representing ourselves differently from the UKFC report and it could have been possible that we failed to identify any differences at all between their representation of low and

micro-budget production and our own. However, if we had placed emancipation as one of the objectives of our project, I believe we would have constructed processes differently in order to distinguish ourselves from the representation adopted by the UKFC. Personally, I believe this could be considered facipulation towards the outcome of this particular research question and therefore believe it would not have been more reliable. However, I do believe that the emancipatory nature of PV would be a very useful and practical process in exploring themes such as gender inequality or the representation of marginalised groups within film production. I believe there is a clearer case and reasoning behind such an emancipatory approach in relation to these issues which does not necessarily extend to low and micro-budget filmmaking as a whole. As I mentioned earlier, I believe that the lack of existing PAR projects in film production is related to the fact that filmmakers are not perceived to be oppressed.

One of the benefits of adopting the PAR methodology over PV was the collaboration between multiple stakeholders, including academic and industrial partners. I believe the standard of the partnerships (e.g., an internationally recognized film festival and global media companies) demonstrate the credibility and validity of the research question, but also represent the integrity of the research. I make this assertion on the basis that such partners do not wish to be associated with impropriety. The process was also relatively expensive for a postgraduate research project, but I believe the fact that I managed to secure funding also demonstrates the integrity of the project. As such, I believe the research approach can be considered reliable.

Are the results reliable? The PAR methodology led to complications with my researcher positionality. Due to the expensive nature of filmmaking (even low or micro-budget filmmaking), it was unlikely that an existing production would welcome me in to attempt a PAR project. This meant that I needed to create a film project in order to conduct the research, which altered my positionality from being a researcher observing an existing production (an *outsider*), to being central to the production process (an *insider*). As this would have potential for a contamination and bias within the results, I sought to mitigate such concerns by creating structures that would aid the participatory democracy of the project. The first structure was

the timeframe of the production, which would be so short and intense that it would be impossible for me to be everywhere and influencing everything. The second structure was the participant SWOT analysis. The third was the recruitment of local documentarians and photographers who would act as objective observers alongside the process. The fourth structure was the collection of artefacts that were accumulated through the production (media interviews/ blogs and vlogs), which could be used to capture different perspectives.

I believe the timeframe was useful in providing a democratic participatory culture. Most obviously, the post-production team developed their own structures and processes to complete the film, but elsewhere it was evident that participants had been approached and spoke to the documentary team individually without pressure from the rest of the group to present a particular perspective. However, the fact that the documentary was being filmed and could not offer anonymity may have led people to self-censor themselves, for fear of their opinion being heard at a later point and damaging relationships, which has an impact with regard to its reliability. It is visibly evident that Andy Paton is uncomfortable when Gareth Nolan starts to recount a story told in the bar (Artefact 11, 36:44). Andy temporarily walks off-screen and once Gareth has criticized the budget, Andy jumps in to assign his criticism specifically to me (his work colleague and friend) as opposed to Gary Hootor:

GARETH NOLAN (referring to Andy Paton): He's now here, on his tod, and he'll be going back as soon as the last shot is cut. So, yeah, thanks.

ANDY PATON (interjecting): James!

GARETH NOLAN: If I hadn't penciled in my holiday I would've been in the same boat.

(Artefact 11, 36:50)

This self-censorship was an expected flaw that we intended to mitigate with the participatory SWOT process, which was anonymous. However, the participant involvement with the SWOT process was abysmal and without a doubt my biggest regret within this process. I believe participants were simply too distracted, and it was difficult to regain their focus and attention once the filmmaking was over. This

was probably worsened by tiredness and a sense that it would be a boring process as opposed to the fun of production. My inability to capture everyone after the screening and devote proper time to it was a fundamental error, as it was never going to work within the wrap party, which was an idealistic and naïve belief. Whilst I believe that it diminishes the project's potential to uncover more perspectives, I do not believe that it discredits the reliability of the project overall. I would defend criticisms of this lack of participant engagement and its perceived departure from PAR ideology by asserting that there was the *opportunity* to be democratically involved, regardless of whether it was taken. Whilst I believe that there were errors in the facilitation of the process, I do believe that there was significant and meaningful opportunity to have engaged in the reflective part of the cycle if participants had wished to do so. In an ideal situation, the evaluative session would have been more formalised and closely followed the ideal procedure outlined in the methodology, in order to probe the meanings behind their responses. Alternatively, Chevalier and Buckles (2013, p.6) recommended the construction of a balanced learning scheme, incorporating planning, inquiry and evaluation (PIE) using a triangular model. However, I only discovered this approach after our project had taken place.

The documentarians and photographers were initially recruited to create artefacts that would help contextualise the SWOT responses, but the artefacts became the primary evidence sources within the data collection. This is problematic from a methodological standpoint in a PAR project. Firstly, can they be considered *participants*? Whilst the documentarians and photographers were recruited from within the local filmmaking scene, they were not actively engaged themselves within the filmmaking process, they were essentially observers, *outsiders*. Herr and Anderson (2014, p.52) deemed outsiders studying insiders as “irrelevant to action research because it describes a traditional outsider position taken by quantitative and qualitative researchers”. However, I do not believe the distinction can be as clear-cut as *outsider/insider* in their circumstance. There is some evidence of active involvement by the documentarians:

ANDY PATON (to documentarians): Can you ring your partner at the other set? Found out what is going on?

DOCUMENTARIAN (off-screen): Can you not call someone?

ANDY PATON: I don't want to disturb anybody.

GARETH NOLAN: We don't have the authority just to call someone.

(Artefact 11, 19:46)

This is followed by a graphic (Artefact X, 20:05) that reads: "Doco crew calls set on behalf of the editors". This suggests that they were not just passive observers but were actually engaging in the process on occasion too. However, elsewhere there is evidence that I saw them as detached:

ME: It's been difficult because with this project, apart from talking to you guys (referring to documentarians) about it, you can't let people know that that's going on in your mind. That there's an element of doubt.

(Artefact 11, 16:34)

In reality, I believe the distinction between *insider/outsider* in the documentarians' case is variable, and their positionality is not the most significant impact on whether the evidence can be considered reliable (especially as triangulation was later used). Far more uncertainty is raised from the fact that the documentary was constructed into a narrative from footage that they collected during the production. Indeed, Gary Hootor's insistence that the documentary is *not* a reliable portrayal of the process (and his subsequent absence from the storyline) demonstrates that the film has credibility issues as a source of evidence. However, I believe that there are factors that assuage against a complete dismissal of the documentary as a source of evidence. Firstly, the cast and crew saw the documentary and people were entitled to a power of consultation, and whilst it may not have reflected everyone's perspective on the process, it reflected *a* perspective. Secondly, the documentary was screened at Raindance Film Festival in London in 2011, evidence that the festival selectors there saw validity within the film's portrayal, and that it 'rang true' to them as a credible filmmaking experience, even though they were external to our project; an example of Herr and Anderson's (2014, p.68) dialogical validity. Thirdly, the documentary was triangulated as a source of evidence with other artefacts, some of which included Gary Hootor, and the themes were developed accordingly.

At the end of Section 2.2.3. – Participatory Action Research, I developed a six-point list of the characteristics that the project needed to include, synthesised from the literature:

- 1) The process must be situated in a real-world context;
- 2) The process must be collaborative and participatory throughout the cycle;
- 3) The process must be democratic and equitable;
- 4) The process must include practice and reflection;
- 5) Research methods can be mixed but must be suitable for the research question;
- 6) The output must be workable and accountable.

I believe that whilst the project included most of these elements, it has certainly failed in the second aim. Perhaps the biggest flaw when attempting to use a PAR methodology in a filmmaking context is that the number of participants varies depending on what stage you are at in the production. Whereas classroom or company contexts may have a fixed number of participants that can be assumed to be reliably present throughout the process, filmmaking is not so linear or constant.

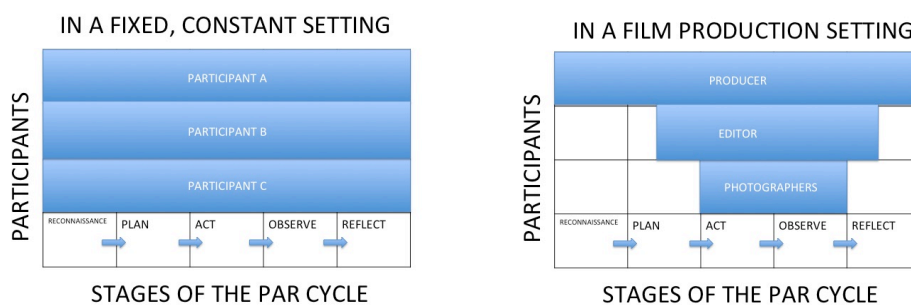


Figure 7 Visual representation comparing film to other traditional, fixed, constant PAR contexts

This uneven availability of participants meant that the different phases of the action research cycle were sometimes conducted without all eventual participants present (e.g., whilst planning would have involved all of the participants available at that stage, it would not include all the participants who would join us later). This is a deviation from the PAR literature explored in Chapter 2, most of which unanimously indicated that PAR should involve all participants in all stages of the cycle.

There were further complications as the participants were all from multiple partners and institutions also, as the different stages started to bifurcate at distinctive points depending on the different circumstances. For example, Staffordshire University were keen to have a return on their investment, so we partnered with Filmbase in Ireland (who had worked with us in Galway) and started to develop an MSc in Digital Feature Film Production based on our recognition that learning was perhaps not taking place on film shoots unless it was placed at the centre of a curriculum and a participant got a qualification at the end of it. Similarly, my blogging and vlogging had brought us to the attention of Raindance, who approached us at Staffordshire University about possible course development around the principle of a broad curriculum that was entirely negotiated by the student. Furthermore, at a screening of the project at a festival in Rome in December 2011, the actor Stephen Rea (Oscar-nominated for his role in *The Crying Game*) asked whether I would consider working on another cycle of the project in Derry as part of the City of Culture celebrations in 2013. My frustrations with the Melbourne project (especially the participant SWOT response) and the opportunity to work with Stephen Rea meant that I accepted, although the project was cut short in early 2013 due to personal tragedies besetting both of us within weeks of one another. Gary Hoctor ended up in a legal dispute with Staffordshire University over the ownership of *The Ballad of Des & Mo*, and our friendship deteriorated after he pulled the documentary out of the Galway Film Fleadh in 2011 despite cast members Mick Cahill and Don Bridges flying from the other side of the world to see it. Each of these circumstances spun out of the original action cycle and their subsequent developments were not in sync with one another. Stringer (1999, p.161) argued that “a good action research project often has no well defined ending” and Piggot-Irvine et al (2015, p.549) agreed, “AR does not always occur in a linear, lock-step fashion in a predictable way.”

Whilst I believe that the lack of participant synchronicity represents a fundamental flaw in adopting a PAR methodology in a filmmaking context, I believe that this discovery itself represents an original contribution to knowledge. I also do not believe that this fundamental flaw in my PAR methodology impairs the reliability of the findings. I believe that as my confidence in PAR waned in the project, I began

to seek a more secure, reliable data analysis methodology, resulting in a meta-evaluative examination of PAR in filmmaking itself. I believe that the subsequent adoption of a grounded theory approach and individual analysis of the PAR artefacts do represent a distinct departure from the multiple narratives that would have been presented under a PAR methodology, but I do not believe that they are any less rigorous. If anything, I believe that the implementation of triangulation and realist and subversive readings of the artefacts have resulted in a more reliable process than was originally likely.

On reflection, my lack of confidence in PAR was largely due to my inexperience as an action researcher and being forced to act within the predetermined timeline of the film production as opposed to at my own speed. As such, I was often learning about participatory action research whilst already within the early stages of the cycle. My decision to latterly veer towards the individual grounded theory analysis was due to a crisis of confidence in PAR as a robust enough methodology in this context. I believe that by adopting the tools of triangulation to seek veracity of themes, I was practically adopting the same positivist approaches that I had derided in the UKFC report. However, this methodology was not the same as the UKFC report. Whereas theirs was an attempt to synthesise a large volume of low and micro-budget film data into a 'comprehensive picture', ours focused on producing one film in the constraints of their data set criteria and then examining it in depth using a set of mixed methodologies.

I suggest that the challenging elements of PAR be viewed not as impediments to the research process but as opportunities for constructing new knowledge and developing new ways of integrating theory, practice, and people's everyday experiences.

(MacIntyre, 2008, p.67)

I do believe that even the initial embarkation on a PAR methodology led us to produce this incredible project in Australia and subsequently discover things that may not have been uncovered by me taking a more conventional ethnographic research approach.

One aspect of PAR that makes it significant to social science research is that it is a research approach that is a theory of possibility rather than a theory of predictability (Wadsworth, 1998). Thus, PAR provides multiple opportunities for practitioners and participants to construct knowledge and integrate theory and practice in ways that are unique and practical to a particular group. Working within the context of possibility, those involved in PAR "regard their research practices as a matter of borrowing, constructing, and reconstructing research methods and techniques to throw light on the nature, processes, and consequences of the particular object they are studying" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 575). When research is viewed from this perspective, there is an overall demystification of what research is and how it can relate to people's lives. Participants of PAR projects discover an appreciation of local knowledge and of their capacity to speak about and to that knowledge. In so doing, they enrich their sense of themselves as contributing members of society. That enrichment fosters community-building, and community-building fosters a willingness to engage in ongoing processes of action and change.

(MacIntyre, 2008, p.67)

I concluded earlier that there was no conclusive evidence to suggest that the film production was an educational experience, although I should clarify that I believe the whole research project probably was an *empowering* experience. We did build a team of people and encourage them to work together in ways that they had not previously, and it is possible interpret from social media data that the community engagement not only existed once we finished but *increased* (see Fig 8). Furthermore, the process generated partnerships (FremantleMedia, Filmbase, Raindance) and projects (course development) that had not previously existed, which is one of the success indicators defined by Piggot-Irvine et al. (2015, p.553).

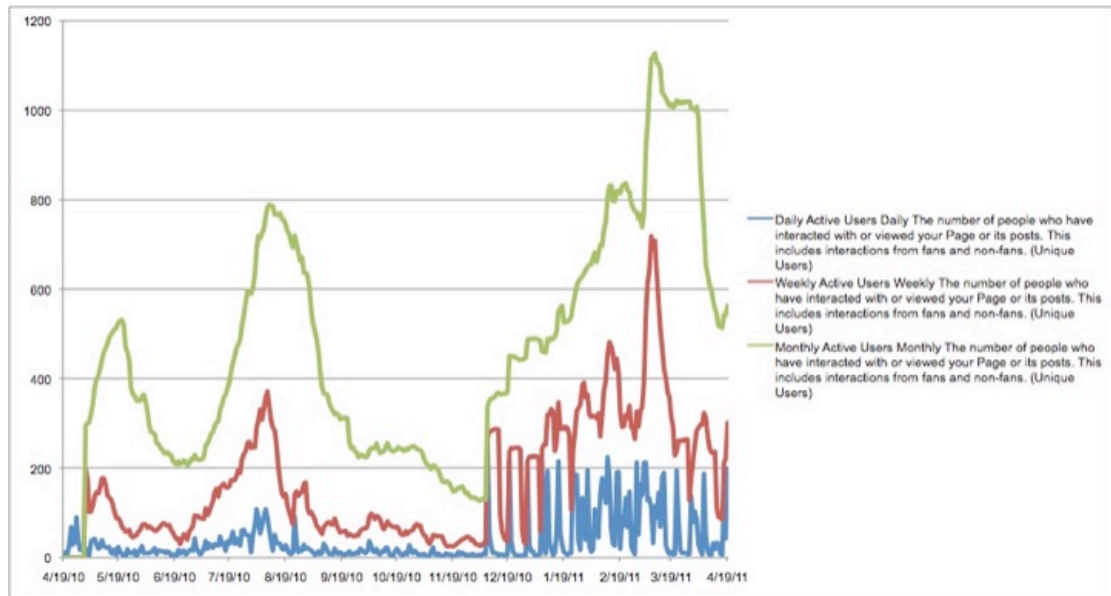


Figure 8 Demonstrating user interaction and engagement on the 72hourmovie Facebook page from April 2010 through to April 2011 (the project was August 2010).

However, defining the project as a success as a result of the community engagement or subsequent partnerships is not the same as establishing the process as reliable. I do not believe the PAR process was particularly reliable, although this does result in significant findings about the flaws of pursuing PAR methodologies in a filmmaking context. The lack of formal structure within the PAR process is intimidating for a researcher, and the academic literature regarding PAR has inconsistent methodological approaches and is ideologically variable. Ironically, given its emphasis on action, I found PAR to be theoretically appealing but very difficult in practice. Nevertheless, I believe the *outcome* is reliable because we ultimately produced a film in the constraints of the UKFC data set criteria and used various approaches to address the PAR weaknesses, including public interviews by third parties external to the project, and triangulated the findings before a comparing the themes with wider literature. I believe this process has ensured that the findings of the thesis are reliable, even if the methodological process of data collection prior to it had been suspect.

Having reached this conclusion, the final chapter will briefly summarise the project before addressing perhaps the most critical question: *so what?*

7. Conclusion

This chapter will begin by briefly revisiting the research question and summarising the findings of the discussion, before indicating the importance of these findings both in relation to theoretical and policy implications. The chapter (and thesis) will conclude with recommendations for further study.

7.1. Revisiting the research question

The aim of this thesis was to make an original contribution to knowledge by exploring whether there was a different perspective to low and micro-budget filmmaking than had previously been portrayed in the UK Film Council's Low and Micro-Budget Film Production report (2008). The UKFC had commissioned media consultants Northern Alliance to create an "accurate account of this part of the film sector" (UKFC, 2008, p.2) and claimed that the report was "the first ever comprehensive picture of low and micro-budget filmmaking in the UK" (UKFC, 2008, p.2). The UKFC had commissioned their report as there had been a significant growth in low and micro-budget filmmaking within the UK and they wished to understand the phenomenon. The rationale within this thesis argued that the methodologies used by the UKFC were unsuitable and were not capable of portraying an accurate account of low and micro-budget filmmaking. A research question was developed:

- Would a different methodology present a perspective of low and micro-budget film production that differs from the 'comprehensive picture' that the UKFC claimed to portray?

A Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology was chosen to answer the research question, in part because it had not been used to explore low and micro-budget filmmaking before, but also because of the ideological principles behind the methodology. PAR was appealing because of its democratic principles and acceptance of a plurality of voices, although the emancipatory aspirations of some PAR theorists did not seem feasible within a filmmaking context. However, the practical application of PAR was problematic. It was necessary to produce a feature

length film that would qualify under the UKFC's data set criteria, which required many resources, multiple partners and logistical implications that ultimately meant that the project failed to fulfill the methodological principles of PAR. The discussion concluded that whilst the PAR methodology was not reliable in a filmmaking context, the outcomes from the project could be considered reliable due to the adoption of further, more robust data analysis methods in the evaluation of the project. The discussion established that there were three conclusions to be drawn from the study:

- That the UKFC report was *not* a 'comprehensive picture' of low and micro-budget film production.
- A different methodology *does* present a different perspective of low and micro-budget film production.
- Original contributions to knowledge can be identified as a result of this study.

I will now establish why these findings are important and address the wider implications for each outcome.

7.2. Importance of findings and implications

The UKFC report was *not* a 'comprehensive picture' of low and micro-budget film production.

Why does it matter if the UKFC report was a 'comprehensive picture' or not? The UKFC report was intended to "inform the UK Film Council's policies" (UKFC, 2008, p.2), so it was crucial that they had a clear understanding of the subject they were engaging with. By failing to acknowledge the social aspects (e.g., the pressure on personal lives, the 'total institution' of work and play), the UKFC missed an opportunity to discuss the issues and whether they could or should be addressed or not. It is difficult to determine whether the social aspects of film were left out of the UKFC report because they are taboo or because they are widely accepted. If filmmaking does prevent people from starting families or enjoying an existing family life, how does that impact on the types of people employed within the film

industries? If career progression requires you to work and play hard, what impact does that have on the types of people who work in the industry? What impact does it have on the gender imbalance? Accepting the social situation as *fait accompli*, or ignoring the social aspects all together, means that the conditions go on unchallenged. If the UKFC report had identified these issues, at least there would have been an impetus to facilitate debate about the culture surrounding filmmaking. Perhaps the UKFC felt that they did not need to challenge the status quo, as it was part of their remit to support “film culture and heritage” (UKFC, 2008, p.1), even if that meant sustaining the imperfections within it. However, as a publicly funded institution, there should have been some ethical or political obligation to address such issues.

The policies that the UKFC did create were a direct response to their report, and they continue to inform the policies of their successors, Creative England and the British Film Institute (BFI). They funded low and micro-budget filmmaking training schemes that aimed to get talented filmmakers on to the next rung of the proverbial filmmaking ladder (such as the now defunct Digital Shorts scheme and the continuing feature development scheme iFeatures). The iFeatures scheme has selection procedures that reject most applications and shortlist a talented few. The shortlisted few are placed on a story development programme that trains participants in the skills that were identified in the UKFC report as being deficient in low and micro-budget filmmakers (producing, distributing etc.) before selecting an even smaller few to go into production itself; over 400 teams applied for the scheme in 2015, three finally went into production (iFeatures, 2016). Not only does this process have the potential to alienate those that are not successful in the selection process, it reinforces the dominant, industrial filmmaking ideology that was present in the UKFC report. There is little to suggest that the products of this scheme are innovative or questioning, rather the training is focused on imitating the ways that industry works. Worse still, these schemes are not particularly prolific or widespread: Microwave has produced eight features in 10 years, iFeatures has produced eight in seven years. So the selected few really are an exclusive few. Most concerning is why public money should be funding such training at all, especially if it is not challenging the status quo but looking to succeed within it. One of the particularly positive outcomes of the action research project was the creation of a

programme that could offer an alternative to the UKFC/Creative England/BFI training approach. As a result of this research, we recognised that low and micro-budget film production is not an explicitly educational experience unless you make it so. We developed an MSc Digital Feature Film Production curriculum at Staffordshire University and franchised it to Filmbase in Dublin, Ireland. We felt the scheme would be more appropriate if it had fundamentally different principles than the UKFC/Creative England/BFI approach:

- Participants would get actual academic credit and qualifications to demonstrate the learning. They would be *students*.
- The students would pay a fee to be enrolled but subject to much clearer transparent admission processes than those used in funding schemes.
- The students would not be working on their own projects in competition with one another, but on a project that had been selected for them with professional writers already attached.
- The students would collaborate with one another on all aspects of the production supported by industry advice in lectures and seminars.
- The practical work on the film could be considered *training* in how films are currently made, but the independent research that would accompany the curriculum was *education* and encouraged students to theorise forward as to how films may be made in future.

This course has produced seven features in five years, and all have been funded through student fees and money raised by students on the course as part of their curriculum, which is far more sustainable than the grant-dependency of the UK schemes. Granted, the participants need to be able to afford to attend the course, which has an impact on who attends, but the beneficiaries are still more widespread than a selected few and scholarships have enabled some to attend who would not have otherwise done so.

If the UKFC's policy of low and micro-budget film training schemes were inappropriate, what should their policies sought to support? Firstly, I believe a social media infrastructure would have been useful as a platform for facilitating

discussion, connecting resources, networking, sharing work opportunities and screening finished projects for feedback. Although such a platform would have privileged participants with access to internet connections and computer skills, it would have been more democratic and inclusive than the UKFC's sporadic networking events in a handful of cities. In fairness to the UKFC, perhaps they were reluctant to develop such a project as the Independent Filmmakers Network had already established the Shooting People online community in 1998. However, Shooting People has a paid membership, and the UKFC would have undoubtedly received criticism for undercutting a commercially viable network, regardless of whether a free version would have expanded the user base. However, the absence of a free network for low and micro-budget filmmakers (who are naturally conscious of money) has meant that the communities have migrated onto free platforms such as Facebook, which again, promotes a blurring of social and professional contexts. Recently in 2015, the Hiive social media site was launched fulfilling some of the purposes I have outlined above. It is too early to determine whether this will be successful or not. Hiive was produced by a consortium of the Creative Industries Council, Creative Skillset and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES). Neither Creative England nor the BFI are partners on the project.

Therefore, the UKFC's failure to produce a 'comprehensive picture' resulted in a limited response in policy that was (and continues to be) less about supporting low and micro-budget film culture in all of its manifestations, and more about servicing industry.

A different methodology *does* present a different perspective of low and micro-budget film production.

The UKFC described their report as an "accurate account" (2008, p.2) of low and micro-budget film production. The term 'accurate' has many synonyms: correct, precise, exact, right, errorless, faultless, perfect, valid, specific, detailed, explicit, clear-cut, unambiguous, authoritative, reliable. As this thesis has established, 'accurate' is an unjust description. Is it important to acknowledge that a different methodology presents a different perspective than the UKFC's report, primarily because the UKFC used such definitive, positivist language inappropriately.

Whilst the PAR methodology was as flawed (if not more so) than the positivist approach, at least there is an awareness of its failings rather than purporting to tell a 'truth'. The UKFC report did not examine the positionality of the media consultants who conducted the research, and whether any researcher bias was possible. The report also omitted any information about how the data analysis was conducted. This would have been useful, because it would have indicated whether the researchers went looking for existing themes or searched for emerging themes within the responses (or both). Without such information, it is difficult to determine whether the data has been cherry-picked to reinforce a pre-determined course of action.

The key point is that we have not yet discovered a definitive methodology for examining film production, largely because it is complex and has so many variables within it. We should try new methodologies in an attempt to understand film culture, not use reductive approaches that diminish film production to a purely commercial culture. The wider implication for taking this approach towards filmmaking is a devaluation or lack of acknowledgement for any of the other roles that film may play within our society.

The term 'creative industries' stimulates disquiet because it evokes the contentious issue of culture's relationship to value, and more especially, the market, underscoring debates concerning culture as a public good, the transcendent role of arts and its civilizing affect and effect. Concerns are that marketization and the imperatives of the commodity form fundamentally change cultural products, cultural producers and cultural labour, constituting yet further accreditation of business and management into cultural life.

(Townley, B et al., 2009, p. 940)

It is therefore critical to conduct research using different methodologies that can highlight other values within our creative endeavours, not just the monetary ones.

Original contributions to knowledge can be identified as a result of this study.

Most critically for this thesis, it is important that original contributions to knowledge can be identified and explicitly stated.

Firstly, the research project proved that Blair's (2001) theory of filmmaking as a 'total institution' and Rowland and Handy's (2012) observations on the pressure filmmaking places on social relationships, both of which refer to industrial filmmaking contexts, can be found within micro-budget filmmaking also. This is not surprising, given that our project operated in similar conditions to industrial models as a result of the UKFC's limited interpretation of low and micro-budget film production. If we had produced a short film (which is arguably still low and micro-budget film production), the themes may have been different. However, a different understanding has developed as a result of this study; it is one thing to endure these conditions and circumstances as a result of your *work* (because you are being paid); it is different to endure them *voluntarily* for the love of filmmaking. Whereas the previous belief is that the 'total institution' is a result of film production working conditions, this study suggests that it is something participants actively choose to engage with in some cases (acknowledging that not all low and micro-budget filmmaking is voluntary). This creates a different impression of what was understood prior to this thesis and therefore represents an original contribution to knowledge. I am cautious of reaching this conclusion on the basis of one sole project, which could be an outlier and not indicative of all low and micro-budget filmmaking. However, I am making the assumption on the basis that the documentary, which portrayed this theme within our project, has been selected and screened at festivals (such as Raindance) and can therefore be assumed to be a true likeness of other filmmakers' micro-budget experience.

The second contribution to knowledge is a methodological contribution. One of the reasons for choosing the PAR methodology was because I could not find any examples of it having been used before to explore filmmaking. There remains a case for trying to use PAR to understand film production, especially in an industrial context where workers may be exposed to exploitative practices such as long hours and anti-social work patterns. Can PAR *emancipate* participants from these practices? This research project has demonstrated that PAR would be unlikely to be successful in a filmmaking context. Firstly, PAR is difficult to conduct in a

filmmaking environment where not all members of the crew are present at the same time. Whilst this may be possible in a film studio environment where everyone is continuously employed and engaged, it would remain difficult in the independent filmmaking sector (which is perhaps where significant employment malpractice takes place). Secondly, it would remain an expensive research project to undertake, and the process would be unlikely to benefit, or be in the interest of, the people financing films. Whilst these conclusions could have been reached in theory, I believe I have discovered them to be so in practice. This contribution to knowledge is important, because film production remains an inequitable culture, and we must continue to be in search of ways to improve this situation.

7.3. Recommendations for further research

In addition to these conclusions, three areas have been identified as areas of possible future research.

Having established that there are social pressures created by low and micro-budget filmmaking production (in keeping with existing research on larger budget productions), potential exists for further research on what impact low and micro-budget filmmaking may have on social circumstances, and whether relationships alter when intrinsic motivation drives the individual as opposed to extrinsic motivation.

Gornostaeva's (2009) research into Camden's spaces and places in which filmmaking processes occur is a valuable insight, yet further research could be undertaken as to whether these types of spaces and places have an impact on the types of people who subsequently engage in film production. Gornostaeva gave some attention to industry newcomers (2009, p.44) the emphasis is on existing producers who were already in industry, and no attention is given to the gender, race or ethnicity of these groups. This would be worth further investigation, perhaps with the PV methodology placing emphasis on their better representation.

Finally, it would be useful to conduct further research into whether micro-budget filmmaking policy should be geared more towards innovation as opposed to training. As this thesis has demonstrated, there are flaws within the existing low and micro-budget training programmes and the policy that informs them. I am obviously biased in my belief that funding bodies could be the organisations to fund research projects such as this one. However, it was hypocritical for the UKFC to suggest that “real innovation and entrepreneurship on the part of producers will be needed to develop new business models and opportunities” (UKFC, 2008, p.28) whilst they funded traditional empirical research and training schemes that imitated industry practice. Having identified the need for innovation, subsequent policy could address the demand.

7.4. Closing statement

This thesis has shown how the UK Film Council’s Low and Micro-Budget Film Production (2008) report took a one-dimensional perspective, in which low and micro-budget filmmaking was only valued for what it could contribute to the wider film industry. Despite this myopic perspective, the UKFC report informed (and continues to inform) policy with regard to low and micro-budget film production. I believe this thesis, and the ambitious practice-based research within it, makes a positive contribution to knowledge by presenting a multi-faceted representation of low and micro-budget filmmaking. This new understanding is important, not only because the UKFC’s report was a disservice to low and micro-budget film culture, but also as this area of filmmaking is often underexplored in relation to more glamorous, mainstream or economically influential filmmaking. It is also probable that more filmmakers will experience low and micro-budget production at some stage of their career than higher budget productions, which is why it is all the more crucial to develop a better understanding of what it actually entails.

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