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EDITORIAL [JoS 9.2]

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In the first few years of the recent rise in screenwriting studies, from around 2008 onwards, it was probably inevitable that Screenwriting Research Network conferences were held in Europe. From the start, however, it was also clear a worldwide network had no business assuming that Europe – or anywhere else – was the natural home for our new research community, or that our conferences should remain there as if by right. While the first four conferences were in the UK, Finland, Denmark and Belgium, the next two plunged off to Australia and the US. Returning to the UK in 2014, the SRN also held a regional conference in Chile in the same year, and in 2015 the SRN Executive agreed that 2017 should be held as far away as the average Northern European believes they can go before falling off the edge of the world – New Zealand. So, while there is still a noticeable European bias to the activities of the SRN, there is a clear and demonstrable desire to be global, in reach and perspective. The Journal of Screenwriting has always shared this desire to reach out to more scholars from around the world, and the 2017 SRN conference held at the University of Otago, in Dunedin, New Zealand/Aotearoa offered the chance to access more research work from

outside Europe than usual. We've responded to that, and although some of the papers and keynotes have already been earmarked for publication elsewhere, in Davinia Thornley's forthcoming edited collection True Event Adaptation: Scripting Real Lives, we're pleased to say that none of the authors in this issue are based further north than Santiago, Chile. There was no intention to exclude anyone, especially those who made longer treks than others, but we're delighted that this Conference issue has come together with a decidedly Southern flavour.

Our first piece is a transcript of a keynote presentation clearly saying the unsayable – that the ways women characters have been written for the screen is plainly biased, in general practice. Two New Zealand writers, Kathryn Burnett and Fiona Samuel, skilfully use the discourse of the manuals to present a dozen ways in which women characters are commonly written with less attention (and respect) than male characters – a bias which, when outlined like this, is instantly recognisable as true. It's that recognition which is so damning. It may not be a rigorous academic research method, but it's certainly one which provides enough informal evidence from writers with the relevant experience to suggest a conventional research study is very likely to come up with very similar conclusions. Bring it on, we say.

Two issues ago, the Journal of Screenwriting (vol.8 no.3) was a special issue looking at script development. Edited by Craig Batty, Stayci Taylor, Louise Sawtell and Bridget Conor – three of whom are based in Australia, and the fourth originating from New Zealand – it effectively acknowledged that screen idea development is the core of what happens in screenwriting (in its broadest sense). In the same way that, a decade ago, we were struggling with how to comprehend writing a screenplay as both a set of practices and as a product resulting from them, we are following up with questions about what really happens to a screen idea as it forms in the minds of the work group involved in creating it. Batty et al rightly asked 'how to we define it as a practice?', 'how do we study it?', and how does it

work in relation to who holds power? (Batty et al 2017: 220, 221). These and other questions provoked a follow-up paper in Dunedin by two of the original team plus six more from various Melbourne universities (including a co-editor of this issue of the Journal). The realisation this time is that what we have here is a 'Wicked Problem' – not just a tricky one, or even a deliberately evil one, but one whose complex and contradictory qualities require study from several perspectives and viewpoints. There's a similarity here with Laurel Richardson's metaphor of research as studying the facets of a crystal, which look different from different sides but which nevertheless form part of a unified whole (see Richardson, 2000). Wicked or not, this line of enquiry is clearly an important one for understanding what happens in the creation of our screen stories, and we hope this article stimulates further discussion on this topic within and outside the pages of the Journal.

Another very important topic for the future of screenwriting is how to write for VR, which may well be the most exciting and challenging technical development of the decade. The very possibility that the viewer can control the viewpoint while the action continues brings new sensations and new scope for creating (multiple) meaning. Another author published in the script development issue, Kath Dooley, re-appears here with her work investigating the changing practices and possibilities in writing for 360-degree Virtual Reality projects. Based on interviews with three Australian practitioners, Dooley identifies the knowledge gap in screenwriting research with regards the challenges the new technology poses for traditional screenwriting practice, establishing both the extent of this burgeoning field and the limited research currently available. In particular she suggests that the demands of VR contests established practices in screenwriting, including narrative structures, characterisation and context/world and in particular the viewers' relationship to these.

In a complementary piece of work, Miriam Ross and Alex Munt look at the notion of a 'cinematic' VR, using both historical analysis to learn from antecedents in (Western) art traditions, and a practice-based study to see what can be learned from diving in and doing it. The first part is attempting to head off a Hollywood power-grab, as happened with the general adoption of the Classic Hollywood system, by opening up the possibility for this new technique to 'find diverse paths as it responds to narrative concerns'. The second asks the basic question of how we might screen write for this new technique. Both questions are concerned with space, marrying 'a historically-based spatialization of the image with the question of the spatialization of the screenplay for CVR 360-degrees media'. These are important and direct questions, following in the visual tradition established by Kathryn Millard, and we have to ask ourselves what VR means for our ways of conceiving (and developing) the screen idea, in the future.

Finally, returning to the SRN Conference theme of fact and fiction, truth and the real, it is fitting to conclude this issue with Carmen Sofia Brenes' analysis of the biopic Jackie (2016), directed by Chilean film-maker Pablo Larraín and written by the American screenwriter Noah Oppenheim in which she argues for the genre's capacity to reconstruct and re-present historical figures. Grounded in Paul Ricoeur's reflections on narrativity, time and history (Ricoeur 1992), Brenes argues that historical films do not only reproduce facts but also allow filmmakers to interpret the characters' experience of depicted events. Brenes explores how Ricoeur's concept of the relationship between story and history is used in Jackie to give the audience a unique insight into the personal life and decisions of the historical figure, Jacqueline Kennedy, at its core.

References

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