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The composer as bricoleur: Notions of
contemporary opera in the genesis of a short
film

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the degree of
Master of Arts (Performing Arts)

Tsok Wee Yap

Edith Cowan University
Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts
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Abstract

This Masters of Arts by research examined contemporary notions of opera in the genesis and production of an original short film through the composer as bricoleur. This research into the area of film, music, and composition, was motivated by a desire to resolve the conflict between the conventions of opera and cinema in presenting contemporary opera as film. In realising the short film, this research examined both cinematic and operatic conventions, with particular focus on the operatic voice, verisimilitude, and the suspension of disbelief as fundamental challenges and conflicts related to unifying opera and film. The adaptations and ideas generated in resolving this conflict came from a practice-led research methodology that encompassed the notion of the composer working as a bricoleur.

Working as a composer-bricoleur, my identity and role throughout the course of the research had to evolve and adapt to challenges as the project emerged. In this role, I was an author, scrap-booker, composer, scriptwriter, director, musician, researcher, audience member and collaborator. Through bricolage, I was able to piece the research and project together, engaging in strategies that included literature and multimedia review; classes in scriptwriting, acting and producing; online blogging; practice trials; resonance meetings; and conscious and unconscious observation. The integration of these strategies and practices led to the creation of the short film *Out of Sight | Out of Mind*, a social and interpersonal story about a girl and her father, and an accompanying exegesis.

Through this research, the conventions of opera and cinema were revealed to be disparate to and unaccommodating of each other. This was resolved by readapting the operatic voice for film and employing surrealism in the film's construction. In this contemporary screen opera, the operatic voice included spoken dialogue, affected dialogue, singing and whispering. By working from pre-production to post-production, and applying contemporary notions of composition, I was led to consider the entire audio track of the short film as composition.

In the construction of the film, *Out of Sight / Out of Mind*, notions of contemporary opera, composition and surrealism were applied. While this resolved a significant conflict between opera and film, it also indicated similarities between contemporary screen opera and screen musicals or other films with music. This raises questions for future study in this area. Principally, it questions whether cinema is merely an incarnation of opera in which the drama unfolds on a screen, rather than a stage.

The declaration page
is not included in this version of the thesis

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