

**Conversations in Black: Applying Critical Race
Theory to study issues of 'Race' and Black Film
Production in Media and Film Studies**

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Abstract

The contemporary state of Black Film increased in the production of a diverse slate of Black Films during the period 2009 to 2017. When looking at the box office, and the duration of several black films such as *12 Years a Slave*, *The Butler*, *Selma*, *Hidden Figures*, *Get Out*, certain myths or apprehensions were dispelled that generally plague films that star and feature all-black casts, themes, narratives, and storylines. This PhD explores the perspectives of Producers of Black Film by examining how they construct/deconstruct Black Film. A practice-based thesis, with its accompanying artefact, explores the perspectives of the Producers of Black Film through analysis and reflection. My specific focus is on the *industry perspectives* from these Producers of Black Film and the importance of their filmmaking practices to create, develop and produce Black Film content. The mode of analysis is informed by qualitative interviews, participant observation, and ethnographic filmmaking practices in order to engage with Critical Race Theory to frame this thesis around the lack of scholarship regarding issues of 'Race' in the areas of Media and Film Studies. Because the production practices involved with Black Film have been a neglected area of research, my study intervenes and contributes to knowledge by presenting and illustrating the importance of Black Cultural Production. This analysis further leads to a model of agency I refer to as Black Film Cognition, focused on practitioners involved with producing Black Film that has not previously been studied within Media and Film Studies.

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Part I

Chapter 1. Introduction

This PhD has explored the perspectives of Producers of Black Film regarding Black Film and the Black Film production process as research. It has been conducted by practice-based methodology and through the production of a 20-minute film called *Conversations in Black*. The second component of the submission is this written thesis. Here, I discuss the research journey I have undertaken and my argument for creative practice film production as research. I have structured the text as a series of thematic chapters which critique and explore the key themes that have emerged through undertaking this project.

The concern for this research has been the lack of academic or industry engagement regarding the production practices utilised by Producers of Black Film. The aim of the research was to contribute towards efforts to investigate the re-emergence of contemporary Black Film by applying Critical Race Theory to the growing field of industry analysis within Media and Film Studies. As an exploration through practice, emphasis is placed on my own practical engagement, as I experiment with filmmaking techniques and processes to create an audio-visual artefact on the subject I refer to as Black Film Cognition. Throughout the process, I have been concerned with the question of how to conceive of contemporary Black Film and the perspectives from practitioners throughout the filmmaking process as a form of academic research. In this context, the research question used to frame my study is the following:

*How do industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production
perceive the challenges of producing contemporary Black Film?*

Conversations in Black was developed to enable the consideration of this question, as well as building on themes and tenets associated with Critical Race Theory to present the perspectives and responses as a contrast to industry

perceptions regarding Black Film. As a conceptual piece, I consider *Conversations in Black* to be an experiment featuring the perspectives from industry practitioners whose experiences provide differing accounts of the development and production of Black Film. A significant feature of the film's design was to experiment with the performative and narrative functions of documentary, incorporating qualitative-based interviews, to present *Conversations in Black* as a counter-narrative to dominant discourse about Black Film. This research was carried out from 2012 to 2017 and examines how Producers of Black Films discuss creative decisions, development and production of Black Films. I explore the manner in which 'Blackness' is constructed/deconstructed. The culmination of this project is a creative practice-based PhD consisting of 50% practice and 50% written exegesis, examining how industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production perceive the challenges of producing contemporary Black Film.

Why Black Film?

Critically-acclaimed Black filmmaker Spike Lee said, "Black audiences are dying to see themselves portrayed realistically" (as quoted in Margolis, 1999, p. 50). Additionally, Lee states, "people of colour have a constant frustration of not being represented, or being misrepresented, and these images go around the world" (Spike Lee Quotes, 2014). Initially, I became interested in this project after thinking about the rising number of films featuring a majority or all-Black cast, depicting characters, storylines, narratives and plots in or about the Black experience or culture. Several works by Donald Bogle, Thomas Cripps and Gladstone Yearwood have been considered influential in advancing Black Film scholarship, by documenting the "emancipatory/pedagogic value of Black cinema *from the text to the spectator*" (Wilderson, 2010), and by providing a "comprehensive portrait of

Black Films while acknowledging its elusive and paradoxical nature” (Snead, 2011). Anecdotally, this research project was inspired by a lifelong love of film, coupled with an attempt to understand how I could explore the filmmaking process and techniques of contemporary Black filmmakers and the films they create, develop and produce.

As a young child growing up, film as a medium offered me a world full of imagination, and impossible and, dare I say, improbable dreams. I was inspired by a love of film, and film’s ability to enlighten and create entertaining mythical beings from far, far away, as well as superheroes and heroines with amazing powers, based on true stories and some make-believe. I was also inspired by film’s ability to educate, by interweaving life lessons regarding family, love, laughter, courage and a sense of purpose, all filled with musical scores and brilliant soundtracks. Unbeknownst to me, film also offered a future career path.

As I began to grow and mature, I recognised that even the films I loved when I was growing up, rarely, if ever, had characters, stories or plot lines that looked like me or resembled my family dynamic, or related to my socioeconomic and/or political upbringing. I was neither Luke Skywalker nor was I akin to any of the distinct characters made popular during the Blaxploitation Era.

I have been working in the film and entertainment industry for over 20 years, in the areas of publicity, promotions, development, programming, talent representation and production. My career began as a publicity assistant/coordinator at the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). I then worked as an agency assistant at the William Morris Agency (WMA) before being hired as a development coordinator for the Lifetime Network. After leaving the Lifetime Network, I worked as a production manager and associate producer for various production companies, including Ridley Scott and

Associates, Scott Free, Totem, Black Dog Films, ABC Family, HBO, Paramount, Universal, Telemundo, E!, MTV, Endemol, BBC America, and Black Entertainment Television (BET), as well as the commercial agencies Saatchi and Saatchi, Wieden and Kennedy, Globalhue and McCann Erickson. Throughout my career, I have been involved in the development, production and programming of creative material for commercial advertisement, scripted/non-scripted series, documentaries and music videos. While I initially went to school, graduating with a bachelor's degree in Producing and Production Management, my formal training and knowledge of television and film production were learned through countless hours of practical experience enhanced by observation of colleagues in the field.

When deciding to return to university to pursue practice-based research, my ideas concentrated on the ongoing industry-wide sentiment regarding the production of Black Films and how that impacted me and others as Black filmmakers. The beliefs that "Black movies don't make money"¹ and "Black narratives are not marketable beyond Black audiences"² were often stated by Hollywood and mainstream filmmakers when defending their refusal to develop, produce or distribute films featuring all-Black casts or depicting certain Black-themed narratives. Throughout my career, I had the opportunity to work with many directors, producers and writers who were in the process of developing a variety of films and television projects that would feature Black talent, Black themes, and feature predominantly Black casts.

¹Hornaday, Ann. "At Cannes, Challenging the Notion That Black Films 'Don't Travel'". *The Washington Post*, 2013, www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/at-cannes-challenging-the-notion-that-black-films-dont-travel/2013/05/14/5f43de96-b9b3-11e2-b94c-b684dda07add_story.html?utm_term=.9cffb446783d.

² Rose, Steve. "Black Films Matter – How African American Cinema Fought Back against Hollywood." *The Guardian*, 2016, www.theguardian.com/film/2016/oct/13/do-the-right-thing-how-black-cinema-rose-again.

These projects were often referred to as 'Black Films' and were met with some resistance, based on the story, the narrative and/or the talent.

For example, during an interview with Henry Louis Gates in *America Beyond the Color Line*, Oscar-nominated director John Singleton revealed, when pitching his films in order to receive funding, he pitched the action, violence and broad appeal of his film projects, and never mentioned his intention to enlighten African Americans or change the general public's perception of African Americans.³

An even better example is Will Smith and the production of *Hitch* (2005). Producers of the film struggled to find a suitable female actress to play opposite Will Smith. In fear of the film being perceived as a 'Black Film', the producers did not want to cast a black actress (Halle Berry). Casting a white actress was considered a significant risk because of a lingering discomfort among some audiences with interracial relationships (Weaver, 2011). While the issue was believed to be resolved when the producers cast Cuban-American actress Eva Mendes, Will Smith's comments during the casting suggested otherwise:

There's sort of an accepted myth that if you have two Black actors, a male and a female, in the lead of a romantic comedy, that people around the world don't want to see it. We spent \$50 something million making this movie and the studio would think that was tough on their investment (quoted in Weaver, 2011).

Producer/Director George Lucas executive-produced the film *Red Tails* (2011), a fictional account about an all-African American World War II flying squadron. During an interview with John Stewart on The Daily Show, Lucas presented his experience of industry bias towards financing a Black Film with

³ "America Beyond the Color Line with Henry Louis Gates." PBS Paramount, 2004.

no featured white characters, saying that “Hollywood didn't want to put money into a film featuring an all-Black cast” (Lucas, 2012). Lucas recounted the reluctance of the film executives who watched a screening of his film: “There's no major white roles in it at all. I showed it to all of them, and they said no; we don't know how to market a movie like this.”⁴ The significance of these three distinct examples illustrates the interrelation between industry perceptions of Black Film and the impact on contemporary production and its development.

The first thing that became apparent during my informal conversations, both within film studies and also outside, in academia, was just how difficult people found discussing this narrative as it applies to the production and then ‘success’ of Black Film. Although the definition of what constitutes a ‘Black’ film is highly contested, for years, Black filmmakers, and anyone interested in producing films starring or about Black people, have been told that “Black doesn’t travel”, or that films featuring an all-Black cast or which featured Black themes do not make money internationally (Leonard, 2006). The assumption behind this thinking was that the African American experience was too specific to be comprehensible or commercial anywhere but in the United States. Despite the increased output of films, many limitations for Black Films remained. Dennis Greene wrote an article in *Cineaste Magazine*:

The relationship players have convinced themselves that Black Films can do only a limited domestic business under any circumstance and have virtually no foreign box office potential. They assume that the only dependable African American audience is teenagers. They also assume that films that exploit black urban violence are all the black teenage audience and the limited crossover

⁴ <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-january-9-2012/george-lucas>

audiences want to see about black life. Any significant increases in production and marketing costs are projected as a wasted expense that cannot greatly increase the audience for African American films.⁵

Though many political and social changes have occurred since the inception of the Black Film industry, writers, directors, producers and content providers are still subjected to 'pigeonholing' due to Hollywood power brokers' apprehension about funding the endeavours of filmmakers interested in creating, developing and producing Black Films.⁶ The industry-wide perception regarding these films tends to downplay their success and/or devalue their appeal by suggesting that these films or films with a predominately Black cast were higher risk (Iverem, 2007).

From the perspective of film producers and executives, measures used to gauge the level of success were primarily relegated to box office results. The production budgets and resources for Black Films vary but are commonly less than 'mainstream' films (Yearwood, 2000; Benschoff, 2009). Decisions made by producers and film executives are influenced by the notion that Black Films are not 'economically viable' (Smith, 2006). In an article for the Applied Economics Letter, Jordi McKenzie investigated the box office performance of films defined as being 'African American' with respect to their cast and content material, against films that did not have Black actors cast or Black themes in them. The reported findings from McKenzie's study compared films released

⁵ Greene, Dennis. "Tragically Hip: Hollywood And African-American Cinema. Race in Contemporary Cinema, Part 2". *Cineaste*, vol 20, no. 4, 1994, p. 28.

⁶ Martin, Roland. "Hollywood's Irrational Allergy to 'Black' Films." CNN, 2012, <https://edition.cnn.com/2012/01/14/opinion/martin-red-tails-hollywood/index.html>.

in the North American market from 1997 to 2007.⁷ The analysis showed that, in general, Black Films earned higher revenues despite being typically produced on lower budgets.⁸

According to Monica White Ndounou, Hollywood studio executives use the domestic and international markets to determine their investment choices, and this fuels their reluctance to distribute or produce Black Films (Ndounou, 2014). Ndounou examined film budgets and gross profits from Screen Gems to analyse racial disparities in investment patterns. Screen Gems is a speciality studio focusing on films that fall between the wide-release movies traditionally developed and distributed by Columbia Pictures and those released by Sony Pictures Classic. Established in 1999, Screen Gems had, by 2013, produced 58 films and distributed 91 films. From 1999 to 2012, Screen Gems co-produced and distributed a total of 43 films for US theatrical release. Of those, 14 featured predominantly Black casts. Comparing the gross receipts of films can be misleading when production costs are not taken into consideration. The budgets for Black Films produced were between \$4.5 and \$28 million, with most falling under \$15 million. Screen Gems' remaining 29 films, featuring predominantly White casts, were produced with budgets ranging from \$4.5 to \$70 million, with most exceeding \$20 million. Screen Gems invests more money in the production of White Films, which cost a total of \$762 million to produce while earning only a 39 per cent return on investment in the domestic market. These films rely on the international market for significant revenues. Black Films, on the other hand, cost only \$187

⁷ The top 10 African American films ranked in terms of revenue were: *Bad Boys 2*, *Bringing Down the House*, *Big Momma's House*, *Remember the Titans*, *Save the Last Dance*, *Dreamgirls*, *Norbit*, *Are We There Yet?*, *Barbershop* and *Shaft*.

⁸ McKenzie, Jordi. "Do 'African American' films perform better or worse at the box office? An empirical analysis of motion picture revenues and profit". *Applied Economics Letters*, vol 17, no. 16, 2010, pp. 1559-1564, *Informa UK Limited*, DOI: 10.1080/13504850903103689

million to produce and earned 184 per cent return on investment in the domestic market, most often without a significant foreign release.

Ndounou states that racial disparities are apparent, as the return on investment for White Films in the domestic market is clearly much lower than that of Black Films, for which revenues significantly exceed the cost of production; Figures 1 and 2 illustrate this point. Yet, Screen Gems continues to produce a majority of predominantly White Films in pursuit of foreign market revenues, which is a gamble in comparison to the consistency that Black Films have demonstrated in the domestic market. Studio executives quoted throughout Ndounou's book claim that it is not racism, it is only business; yet, we see a very different story in Screen Gems' investment patterns and outcomes. The racial disparities in Screen Gems' film budgets and earnings, which are intricately connected to distribution, are only the tip of the iceberg that threatens to deteriorate the future of African American Film.

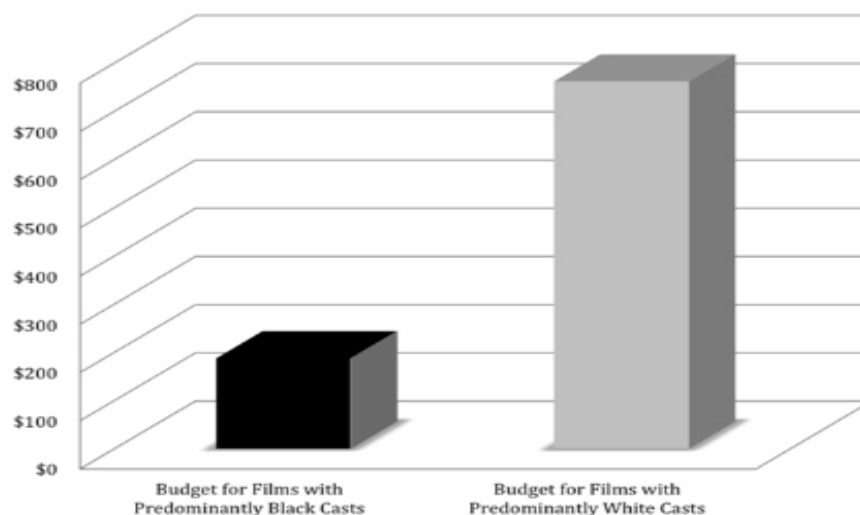


Figure 1 - Production Budgets for Screen Gems' US Theatrical Releases, 1999-2012

Sources: Figures from 43 films co-produced and distributed by Screen Gems are averages of estimates from IMBD.com, The Numbers.com, and BoxOfficeMojo.com.

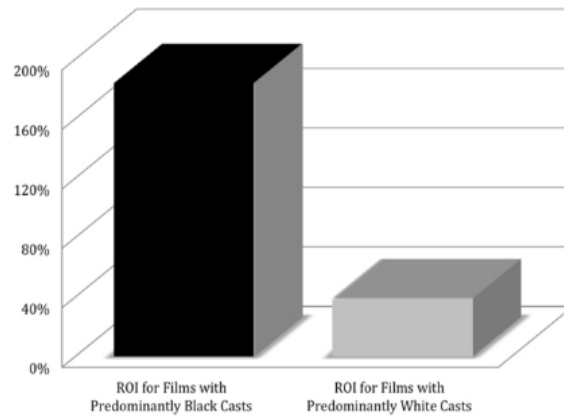


Figure 2 - Domestic Return on Investment for Screen Gems' US Theatrical Releases, 1999-2012

Sources: Figures from 43 films co-produced and distributed by Screen Gems are averages of estimates from IMBD.com, The Numbers.com, and BoxOfficeMojo.com.

These perspectives can have a negative influence on both critical and creative potential, if guided by cultural or racial bias when Producers of Black Film construct and deconstruct during the filmmaking process (Bogle, 1993; Guerrero, 1993; Lott, 1999; Yearwood, 2000) Additionally, criticism of Black Film continues to debate how Black culture is produced in film despite the recent North American box office success, critical acclaim, and failure of some Black Films: *Black Panther* (2018), *Proud Mary* (2018), *Mudbound* (2017), *Marshall* (2017), *Detroit* (2017), *Girls Trip* (2017), *Get Out* (2017), *Hidden Figures* (2017), *Moonlight* (2017), *Nina* (2016), *Miles Ahead* (2016), *Fifty Shades of Black* (2016), *Chi-Raq* (2016), *Race* (2016), *Barbershop: The Next Cut* (2016), *Ride Along 2* (2016), *Perfect Guy* (2015), *Addicted* (2015), *Straight Out of Compton* (2015), *Creed* (2015), *Selma* (2014), *Get on Up* (2014), *Half A Yellow Sun* (2014), *Beyond The Lights* (2014), *Top Five* (2014), *Dear White People* (2014) *No Good Deed* (2014) *Belle* (2014), *12 Years A Slave* (2014), *Fruitvale Station* (2013), *Lee Daniels The Butler* (2013), *Think Like A Man Too* (2013), *The Best Man Holiday* (2013), *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2013), *Django Unchained* (2012), *The Help* (2010), *For Colored Girls* (2010), and *Precious* (2009). My reference to the box office follows a wealth of

literature investigating the determinants of box office success. Litman's study identified production costs, critics' ratings, science fiction genre, major distributor, Christmas release, Academy Award nomination, and winning an Academy Award as all significant determinants of a movie's theatrical success (Terry, Butler and De'Armond, 2005).

For this research, I referenced Black Films released from 2009 to 2017 (see Appendix: Black Film Box Office). When referencing these films, the box office analysis lists films produced and distributed beginning with their theme/genre category, production budget (if known), and estimated box office gross (combining domestic and foreign numbers). Although the films *Marshall* (2017), *Detroit* (2017), and *Red Tails* (2011) failed to exceed production cost figures, there were a number of Black Films listed that doubled and, in some instances, tripled their budget estimates according to these analytical findings. In short, the data did not support the notion that Black Film and Black Film productions are a financial risk. It should be noted, however, that there is no assurance that a film of any kind will be successful. Lee (2014) provides further evidence that non-Black filmmakers and producers endure the same financial risk when attempting to produce Black Films, due to the perceived risk in getting them financed, distributed and marketed. They may also be accused of 'whitewashing' films, which is an idea that has been researched by Vera and Gordon (2003) in their book entitled *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness*. Vera and Gordon argue that there is an existing ideology of white normativity in the US which is reflected on-screen. They claim that Whites portray themselves as ideal Americans who save the broken characters of minorities. In effect, these narrow perspectives impose limitations on Producers of Black Film seeking to make critical and creative contributions via filmmaking during the production process (Seewood, 2008).

Despite what would appear to be a popular form of entertainment that is financially viable and appeals to more than a niche audience, little work has been undertaken to understand and account for the filmmaking practices associated with the production of Black Film. My return to academia to pursue research in this area involved a reconsideration of the practices utilised during the production of Black Film and my participation in it. My goal was to examine how 'Black content' and 'Black Film' are conceptualised within and across filmmaking traditions and creative processes, and how I would interrogate those areas in my own practice. I framed my research around the following questions:

- What makes a film 'Black'?
- How do producers of content use film aesthetics associated with Black Film to depict Blackness?
- Do Black and non-Black filmmakers portray Blackness differently?
- How is Blackness represented in Black films?
- What, if any, racial bias, prejudice or stereotypes come into play during the development or production process?

It should be noted that, in this study, 'African American', 'Blackness' and Black Film are understood as the collection of "productions, histories, images, representations, and meanings that are associated with the Black presence and cultural traditions" (Gray, 1995, p. 12). This definition is contested, however, and is an issue I address in Chapter 2 and through interviews with industry practitioners selected for this study.

Engaging in practice-based research provided me with the opportunity to illuminate the significant questions and issues I encountered while producing and production-managing throughout my career. Furthermore, it allowed me the opportunity to research how scholars addressed the production process and filmmaking practices associated with Black Film.

Regrettably, the readily available literature on Black Film, when referencing Media and Film Studies particularly, failed to address the production of Black Film from a filmmaker's perspective, as I would have hoped.

In the book *Framing Blackness*, Ed Guerrero said, "No Hollywood film of any Black image is the result of a single individual's inspiration or effort, but is a collaborative venture in which aesthetics, economics and politics share influences" (Guerrero, 1993, p. 5). For those reasons, I wanted to determine how Producers of Black Film content exercise agency, authorship and voice in their work. How do they respond to challenges regarding identity, essentialism and representation? Are old stereotypical paradigms, narratives and roles associated with Black Film still in existence and do they challenge or reinforce such mainstream narratives, devaluing or placing limits on Black Film?

In the next section, I will explain in more detail the academic context of this thesis, which is to intervene in the lack of research regarding the production of Black Film, apply Critical Race Theory to Media Studies (production studies and industry analysis), and provide justification for my practice-based research. The contemporary debates surrounding authorship, representation, creativity and production processes associated with Black Film, remain connected to film/cinematography but continue to influence how the public conception of, and exposure to, contemporary Black Film is viewed, imagined and received. The foundation for this research, through gathering my evidence and making the accompanying creative artefact, is that the voices and perspectives of the people involved with the production of Black Film have not been sufficiently considered thus far; certainly not as far as Film or Media Studies in the field of industrial process and cultural production studies are concerned.

Research Aims and Context

My aim for this study was to explore how industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production perceive the challenges of producing contemporary Black Film. By focusing on the Producers of Black Film, it was the goal of this research to examine creatively and theoretically how I could present the perspectives from these Producers of Black Film using the framework of Critical Race Theory, to present the term I refer to as 'Black Film Cognition' through my filmmaking practice (see Chapter 2).

This research includes the following positions within the definition of a producer of Black Film content: director, producer, casting director, actor, cinematographer, writer, and editor. It is important to note that I chose to include these positions, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, because of their significant relationships to and throughout the production process. In most instances, as has been my experience, several of these positions overlap or, as one of my interviewees stated, "I help to apply the vision of production before and during the filmmaking process." When referencing my previous work in film, this was seen as a production environment, where creative personnel aligned with my creative practices and values, as well as offering valuable input where and when needed throughout the creative process. While the roles of casting director and editor are traditionally known to be 'below-the-line',⁹ the liaison between these two positions within certain filmmaking practices and my own suggests that they are a significant component of the production process. In an interview with Sally Menke in *The Guardian* (Menke, 2009) entitled 'Quentin Tarantino and I clicked', Menke

⁹ An industry term derived from the top sheet of a budget (Motion Picture, Television, Commercial, Industrial, Student Film, and Documentary). The 'line' in below-the-line is the one separating the Actors, Director, Producers, and Writers from the other crew. Taken from the *DGA 2015 Basic Agreement*. Los Angeles, California: Directors Guild of America. 2011. pp. 13–15

writes: "Editing is all about intuiting the tone of a scene and you have to chime with the director. It's a rare, intense sort of a relationship built on trust, that now he gives me the dailies and I put 'em together and there's little interference."

Accordingly, in the *Casting Handbook for Film and Theatre Makers*, Suzy Catliff and Jennifer Granville interview Director Mike Leigh and his Casting Director Nina Gold, and detail the relationship between the director and casting director as being 'crucial'. In most instances, the casting director remains as a liaison between director, actors and their agents/managers and the studio/network to get the characters in the script cast. While the last word remains with the people in charge, artistic and production, a casting director or 'CD' (and sometimes the casting associate) is in charge of most of the daily work involved in this process during pre-production. For the purposes of this study, I include these two positions within the role of Producer of Black Film.

Consequently, I intend to analyse how these Producers of Black Film in the Hollywood film industry: a) make knowledge claims, b) talk about gaining this knowledge, and c) talk about the aims and practices as it relates to Black Film production – using the lens of Critical Race Theory and Black Film Cognition. In doing so, I will contribute to debates around Black Film, specifically by arguing for (and hopefully illustrating) the importance of the production process. I will interview and analyse these individuals as evidence because of their relationship (academically, professionally and critically) to Black Film, Black Films' target audience, and their ability to utilise a majority Black cast by writing, directing, editing, costume design, and producing to construct themes and stories involving Black culture.

In the following section, I shall look in more detail at the academic context of this thesis, linking Critical Race Theory and Black Film to the burgeoning field of production studies. However, what I felt strongly when I

started this research project, and which is still the case after gathering my evidence, is that the voices and views of the people carrying out the work of development have not been sufficiently considered thus far, as I will mention in this next section and in detail in Chapter 2.

Justifications: Producers of Black Film

Very little has been written about Producers of Black Film and the actual techniques which they rely upon when creating, developing and producing Black Film. Film scholar John Williams suggests that ‘scholarly reticence’ around research into commercial Black filmmaking is a ‘thorny topic’ (as quoted by Quinn, 2013). Williams bases this claim on the deficiency in research that exists regarding the racial division of labour in production (Caldwell, 2008)¹⁰ and how that potentially impacts the filmmaking process (Coleman, 2006). As such, it has been noted on numerous occasions by different theorists that Black Film is largely devalued (Lott, 1999) and misunderstood (Diawara, 1993) within the film industry. Furthermore, film theory outside of Black Film studies fails to address the validity of Black Film production (Gillespie, 2007; Hooks, 1992; Jiles, 2013; Lott, 1999; Quinn, 2012; Yearwood, 2000;) and industry measures impacting production budgets, movie performance, and economics (Harvey, 2012; Lee, 2014; McKenzie, 2010; Ndounou, 2014).

My research draws upon approaches from the cultural industries’ scholarship (Hesmondhalgh, 2005, 2013) and mixed-methods research that Caldwell (2008) utilised primarily through ethnography¹¹ as the basis for

¹⁰ It should be noted that in his work, Caldwell does not include ‘Race’ or research how labour is applied to films made by or for ethnic minorities

¹¹ In [Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television](#), Caldwell is interested in the industrial and social group represented by film and television workers below-the-line, and the interpretative frameworks that inform self-analysis of their creative practice; ironically, Race is not one of those frameworks.

devising qualitative interviews of 'below-the-line' workers in the film industry. Although Caldwell's research places emphasis on 'below-the-line' workers, lacking in his work is the frame of reference used by Producers of Black Film when creating content depicting Black life and culture in film.

There is continued debate around the history of Black Films, and how the representation of the Black image has been framed to counter imagery often proposed primarily by non-Black filmmakers (Cripps, 1977). More significantly, scholars have evaluated Black Film in relation to 'social relevance' by establishing how Black Film can be 'political', 'controversial', and viewed as 'aspirational' (Grant, 2004; Lott, 1999; Mask, 2012; Reid, 2005; Watkins, 1998).

There is a need for greater in-depth analysis regarding the perspectives from Producers of Black Film within the existing field of film theory and criticism, particularly in relation to Black Film. The fact that so little has been written about the more abstract aspects of Black Film production in film may be because academics and critics in the popular press have simply not asked the relevant questions. The latter tend to focus on film text, reception and audience over production, while the former tend to focus on textual, cultural and industrial policy issues (Wilderson, 2010). A sustained focus on Producers of Black Film departs from the theoretical matrix reinforcing much of the work on Black Film theory (Bogle, 1973; Cripps, 1977; Diawara, 1993; Guerrero, 1993; Hooks, 1993; Snead, 1994; Yearwood, 2000). By combining scholarship on Media Studies and cultural production (Caldwell, 2008; Mayer, Banks and Caldwell, 2009; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011) with the broader field of Black Film theory, this thesis aims to provide an explorative study (Yin, 2003, p. 6) which includes both data collected from the literature as well as research interviews with practitioners in the field of Black Film production.

While a focus on Producers of Black Film stems from my own personal experiences as a filmmaker, producing and production-managing commercials, films, music videos and television, it is strongly motivated by the scarcity and lack of scholarship on the subject of Race as it pertains to the production of Black Film within Media Studies (Quinn, 2014; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Mayer, Banks and Caldwell, 2009; Caldwell, 2008).

Even though existing scholarship has presented and debates the ongoing relationship of particular Black Films with their perceived social relevance, a reduced amount of attention has concentrated on the appropriation of these features into the production of Black Film. More importantly, there is seemingly very little consideration for the importance of Black Film production from the perspective of either Black or non-Black Producers of Black Film who are responsible for the creation, development and production of Black imagery as produced and negotiated with other films. The field of Media and Film Studies is therefore pertinent to this thesis in theorising the significance of the producer's perspective when making Black Films, and how they make meaning from production processes through their filmmaking practice (Hall, 2000). This thesis seeks to demonstrate, from a practical perspective, that the production of Black Film signifies more than a broad group of films that can be read and appropriated subversively (read non-normatively) or seen simply as acts of social resistance. Rather, Black Film forms an essential understanding of how Producers of Black Film make sense of their filmmaking practices, as I argue through the process of practice-based enquiry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The previous section introduced the structure and approach for the written component of the thesis, and the accompanying artefact titled:

Conversations in Black.

This literature review outlines some of the key debates that underpin the interventions of this thesis. I begin by examining how scholars have theorised issues of Race from the cultural purview of representation, audience reception, and text. Most importantly, an argument throughout this thesis aims to link literature from Critical Race Theory and Black Film within the growing field of Media and Production Studies. The intention was to engage in a contemporary analysis¹² of Black Film that focused more on exploring how Producers of Black Film contest, control, [re]produce, [re]present and [re]distribute Black images, film 'Blackness', and reflect Black cultural production from their perspective.

The position of my thesis is that Black Film producers' personal observations and understanding of practice are important factors in analysing Black Film and Black cultural production. There is a benefit in understanding how Black Film producers' perspectives present counter-narratives to issues and challenges with regards to Race, racial bias, and the call by several scholars to examine further the production context of Black Film. In building this understanding, I produced and directed the filmed component of this thesis, and therefore my exploration has included practice-based research and theory.

¹² This research looks at and references Black Films produced between 2009 to 2017.

As noted in the Introduction, and further explained in Chapter 3: Methodology, this practice-based research is designed to examine both the content and the perspectives of Producers of Black Film framed through the lens of Critical Race Theory. The focus of this review is to identify pertinent literature, or the lack thereof, in three critical areas:

1. Applying Critical Race Theory to Media Studies
2. Theorising Black Film
3. Introducing Black Film Cognition

The review covers these areas by looking at the literature concerning current Media Studies, approaches that could close gaps identified in current studies, and the implications and application of these approaches.

Current Media and Industry Studies

The area of Practice has become a common keyword in the academic study of culture and media. This preference for practice happens for different reasons, but it mainly addresses “What people do to media” or, particularly relevant in this research, “What people are making together or individually in relation to media.” Couldry (2011) suggests that this perspective forces attention away from texts or structures onto what people are actually doing, or at least what they say they do.

Holt and Perren present *In Media Industries: History, Theory and Method* a justification for the validity and growth in the field of Media Industry Studies (2009, pp. 1-15) as a distinct sub-section of Media Studies. They describe it as the study of media texts, markets, economies, artistic traditions, business models, cultural policies, technologies, regulations and creative expression; and includes discourse in academic publications, trade press, popular press, digital communities, and the blogosphere. When combined with further analysis, using the conventional Media Studies techniques of analysing media

texts, audiences, histories, and culture, the field of research can range across film and TV studies, communication studies, law, public policy, business studies, economics, journalism, and sociology (Bloore, 2014). Miller (2009, p. 184-199) discusses what may be considered the empirical social science techniques of critical cultural policy studies as a result of the influence of regulation and government policy over the Media Industry landscape. According to Bloore (2014), Media Industry studies encompasses a number of disciplines and utilises numerous academic techniques to study the industry in areas pertaining to film and TV studies, communication studies, law, public policy, business studies, economics, journalism, and sociology.

Within the context of Creative Industry studies, Media Industry studies have examined monographs by Hesmondhalgh (2002, 2006, 2007, 2013); Bilton (2006); Deuze (2007); Jenkins (2006); McIntyre (2012); and Davies and Sigthorsson (2013). Additionally, there has been academic focus regarding the work in key journals, including significant essay collections by Lampel et al. (2006); Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee (2008); Holt and Perren (2009); and Deuze (2011). The totality of this work examined the production processes, media production workplace cultures, social and political theory, and the interaction between industry economics and creativity, marketplace, and personal expression; especially in terms of how media businesses are organised as capitalist commercial organisations. As one of the leading scholars in the field, David Hesmondhalgh (2010, p. 145) states, 'The study of media production is booming' as it combines with reception and text. Conversely, Timothy Havens, Amanda Lotz and Serra Tinic (2009, p. 234) provide a differing framework that locates industry, text and audience research on particular organisations, agents, and practices within vast media conglomerates operating at a global level. Despite the difference I am presenting with regard to either production or industry, the number of scholars addressing the field is

growing, with some noted exceptions. Mayer, Banks and Caldwell (2009, p. 2) state their concerns simply: “We are interested in how media producers make culture, and, in the process, make themselves into particular kinds of workers in modern, mediated societies.” Hesmondhalgh (2009, p. 249) states, ‘the study of media production examines the people (producers) and processes (production) that cause media to take the forms they do,’ focusing particularly on the multiple perspectives of historical change and continuity; theories of cultural production, labour and the workplace; political economy; organisational sociology; public policy and regulation; internalisation and cultural imperialism; diversity and social justice issues; and legal and new technology framework examination and analysis of the ownership, conglomeration and links to policymakers of media organisations.

For many of these scholars, Media Industry studies are approached from the perspective of Production studies. According to Mayer (2009, p. 15) this approach incorporates sociology and the observation of workplace culture, with a further definition as to the study of “how specific production sites, actors, or activities tell us larger lessons about workers, their practices, and the role of their labours in relation to politics, economics, and culture” (as cited by Bloore, 2014). The body of work examining workplace culture during production (for example Caldwell, 2008; Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell, 2009; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011) interrogated culture from an ethnographical perspective, to examine how these media businesses are organised as commercial entities operating in a capitalist system. Drawing a similarity to my research, the use of interviews with practitioners and participant observations of behaviour is one part of their research methodology.

At issue for Hesmondhalgh (2010, p. 146) is a concern that questioned serious analysis of production, and whether the various bodies of research have looked at it in the same way. Recent directions in the field of Media

Studies have turned culture into a significant object of study. Strong emphasis has been placed on representations of minorities in media¹³ and their potential biases,¹⁴ minority-language media¹⁵, and ethnic media.¹⁶ For instance, writing in 2005, John Downing and Charles Husband categorised the quantity of research carried out on media production in relation to racism, ethnicity, and the media as “relatively minuscule” compared with the considerable body of scholarship on content. In *Representing Race: Racisms, Ethnicity and the Media*, they provide an explanation of the processes that led to under-representation of minority groups in the cultural industries. In doing so, they use the example of the Hollywood film and television industry. Downing and Husband (2005, p. 163) state:

In the media, race is a ‘mode of construction’ that ‘derives on power from social, psychological dynamics of social categorisation’. Race is a social construction, and these constructs are used by those in power - and through the media - to generate a social hierarchy. Given that the media is often the only interaction people have with racial backgrounds other than their own, these interactions are powerful instances in which perceptions of race are formed and shaped. They could be positive, neutral or negative perceptions.

¹³ Debra L. Merskin, *Media, Minorities, and Meaning: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011)

¹⁴ Robert M. Entman, “Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power,” *Journal of Communication* 57, (2007).

¹⁵ Sari Pietikäinen and Helen Kelly-Holmes, “*The Dangers of Normativity – The Case of Minority Language Media*,” in *Dangerous Multilingualism: Northern Perspectives on Order, Purity and Normality*, ed. Jan Blommaert *et al.* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 194–204.

¹⁶ Isabelle Rigoni, “Intersectionality and Mediated Cultural Production in A Globalized Post-Colonial World,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35 (2012).

Hesmondhalgh and Saha (2013) refer to several studies using industrial approaches¹⁷, that devote some attention and questions of race and ethnicity in the major books and refereed journal articles that comprise the core of research on cultural production, referencing little discussions of race and ethnicity in C. Edwin Baker's 2002 book on *Media, Markets and Democracy* (a leading political economy monograph), in John Caldwell's *Production Culture* (2008; an acclaimed contribution to cultural studies of production), and in Richard Caves' *Creative Industries* (2000; a widely cited book derived from economics and business studies).¹⁸

Themes and Problems in Research on Race, Ethnicity and Cultural Production

Husband and Downing (2005) suggest one of the major themes that has contributed to the lack of research has been unequal access to the means of cultural production, evidencing the dominance of discrimination over non-white and ethnic minority populations when it comes to working in media organisations. Hesmondhalgh and Saha (2013) suggest policy and academic research alike have exposed general patterns of discrimination in the media industries. Scholars including Husband and Downing have been accused of being more interested in cultural production; generally focused on three different dimensions to this issue: discriminatory hiring practices (Husband, 1975; Quinn, 2012), media activism and advocacy (Downing, 2003; Husband &

¹⁷ C. Edwin Baker's 2002 book on *Media, Markets and Democracy* (a leading political economy monograph), in John Caldwell's *Production Culture* (2008, an acclaimed contribution to cultural studies of production), and in Richard Caves' *Creative Industries* (2000, a widely cited book derived from economics and business studies).

¹⁸ David Hesmondhalgh acknowledges that his own work on the cultural industries (2013) in its various editions has not paid sufficient attention to race and ethnicity as quoted by Hesmondhalgh and Saha 2013.

Downing, 2005; Wilson and Gutierrez, 1996), and diversity policies (Bovenkerk-Teerink, 1994; Horsti and Hultén, 2011; Khan, 1978; Malik, 2002).

It should be noted here, that a few criticisms of the work by Downing and Husband in *Representing 'Race': Racisms, Ethnicities and Media* is the broad nature in which they address the issues of race and ethnicity on a global scale. In some instances, the attempts to provide interpretations (see chapters on journalism codes, the PCC or referencing ethnic minorities and stereotyping), appear to be descriptive rather than analytic (p. 158). Most importantly, while their work provides useful information that attempts to outline the issues of race and ethnicity, it feels like they gloss over significant information or strategies that would start at the issue of addressing race and ethnicity, then merely outlining how these issues are prevalent in society or as discourse in the Hollywood film and TV industry.

Most notably, for this research, more impressive examples attempting to address race, ethnicity and cultural production can be found in Herman Gray's *Cultural Moves* (2005), whereby he details how black expressive culture is structured by three main elements: social conditions, political struggles, and cultural discourses. His contribution here illustrates the diversity of blacks and discursive influences; "disputes among blacks about difference, class, community, mass collective action, authenticity, and, of course, representation" (Gray, 2005, p. 18). Another example that directly pertains to this research is how Eithne Quinn (2013) examples Black Film Cognition throughout the body of her work, including the study on Tyler Perry and Will Smith. Referring to it as rare, scholarly analysis of black commercial filmmaking, Hesmondhalgh and Saha (2013) adequately comment on Quinn's ability to show how Smith and Tyler exert agency, with 'race' being an obstacle and experience to build and sustain considerable industrial success. Despite racial inequalities, Smith, through his production with partner James Lassiter,

has chosen to work in the 'Hollywood' system having large commercial success, whereas Perry has built his fame, with Black Films produced and directed primarily for a black audience.

Indicative in these examples are the language and strategies which speak to and address 'race' in a more proactive manner. Returning to the work of Downing and Husband, they do advocate for a level of activism; however, they seem to lack a certain level of action that speaks, versus acknowledging that issues of race and ethnicity exist. For this research, Critical Race Theory offers a different perspective to Media Studies, as it is grounded in a reality that reflects privileges, perspectives and experiences of people of colour as a means to challenge the privileged experiences of whites as the dominant/majority. According to Delgado and Stefancic (1993, p. 161):

Most critical race theorists consider the majoritarian mindset—the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdom, and shared cultural understandings of persons in the dominant group—to be a principal obstacle to racial reform.

The Language of Critical Race Theory

When discussing Critical Race Theory (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002), I refer to issues of 'Race' and 'Racism' when referencing non-Blacks and the dominant group in society, often pertaining to White, heterosexual males who have the most power and privilege (Lindsey et al., 2003).

The majoritarian narratives and claims include an embrace of colour-blindness, meritocracy, and equal opportunity (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Mitchell, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Solorzano and Yosso (2001) note that "These traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power and privilege of dominant groups in US society" (pp. 472- 473).

Critical Race Theory has six key tenets outlined by Dixson and Rousseau (2005), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Matsuda et al. (1993), and Solórzano and Yosso (2002), which are linked into the framework of Critical Race Theory research. The six tenets are (Lynn and Dixson, 2013, p. 183):

- The permanence of racism and racial realism
- A critique of liberalism and a commitment to social justice
- Privileging the lived experiences of people of colour and employing counter-storytelling as a form of scholarship
- Exploring the concept of Whiteness as Property
- Examining interest convergence
- Studying intersectionality and anti-essentialism

Critical Race Theory: A Review

A review of this theory is important to understanding issues surrounding Race as well as identifying those limitations in examining the process of making Black Films.

First, it is important to consider why Critical Race Theory works to answer the questions addressed in making Black Films. Critical Race Theory began because there was a need to focus on Race and how ‘normalized’ racism is a part of the American culture (Parker and Lynn, 2002). Racism is embedded in US culture and, consequently, has impacted the views and beliefs of people of colour by mainstream society. This viewpoint has manifested itself in the structure and interpretation of the legal system by the dominant society and has impacted thinking about the law, racial categories, and white privilege (Harris, 1993).

There are three main goals of Critical Race Theory (Parker and Lynn, 2002). The first is to tell stories originating from people of colour on the impact of discrimination. Qualitative research methods utilising case studies were used to analyse discrimination. In many of the cases, a pattern emerged, and

this became the basis for understanding discriminatory acts by individuals and institutions. Many of the case studies identified the impact of White privilege; those societal privileges that benefit Whites in western countries, and the concept of 'majoritarian politics'. Majoritarian politics occur when the dominant group (Whites) who are responsible for political decisions fail to take into consideration the minority population. The intent of Critical Race Theory is to have counter stories told by people of colour to be the impetus to overturn an existing situation that is discriminatory and challenge the dominant discourses that can serve to suppress marginalized people (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002).

The second goal is to eliminate racial subjugation, while also understanding that race is a social construct and not a biological one (Parker and Lynn, 2002). From this perspective, Race is not a static term but can be determined by political pressures and the individual's life experiences.

The third goal focuses on differences; which include class, gender, and inequities experienced by individuals. This methodology's primary focus is to understand the process of Race and racism, to challenge traditional research methods to chronicle the experiences of people of colour, and to offer transformative solutions to address class, gender, and racial discrimination for our societal and institutional structures (Creswell, 2007).

The Use of Narratives and Storytelling

Critical Race Theory scholars routinely use storytelling and counter-narratives as a way to expose and challenge these majoritarian stories and make visible lived experiences of people of colour (Rodriguez, 2010; Solorzano and Yosso, 2001). Boylorn (2011) states that counter-narratives or counter-stories can also be a powerful pedagogical and research tool that allows educators and researchers to understand better the experiences of people of colour.

The use of narratives and storytelling provides a 'platform' for people of colour who have different experiences and histories with oppression and are therefore able to communicate to their White counterparts a unique perspective that those individuals cannot see or comprehend by themselves. Two objectives form the basis for the individual story, and they are: to "have a person of colour tell their story of discrimination", and to "shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414).

The first goal of storytelling is to share the emotions of what discrimination feels like. The underlying outcome is to hear the story of how it felt to be a victim of discrimination and to inspire in the listener feelings of sympathy, incite awareness, and impact an individual's conscience (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). The second goal is to create doubt on an uninformed, optimistic view that most Whites share, and that is that the US has made satisfactory progress regarding racial equality. There is an underlying assumption that to continue to discuss race is divisive and counter-productive (Delgado and Stefancic, 1998).

The history and discrimination are different for each ethnic minority group in the United States, and their stories are best told from their viewpoint when communicating to the dominant group, especially when they may not understand the factors involved in discrimination (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Taylor, 2009). The 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation* (*The Clansman*) used the "dominant gaze" to project stereotypes and biases as essential 'truths' against Blacks (Russell, 1991); whereas, 100 years later, the 2016 remake by a black producer, director and actor exemplified Critical Race methodology to "redirect the dominant gaze" to produce and create the story of Nate Turner, a freed slave who fought his way to freedom. This narrative is one method to "redirect the dominant gaze", and "make it seen from a new point of view to what has been there all along" (Taylor, 2009, p. 8). The negative impact of

“colour-blindness” can be addressed through narratives, according to Taylor (2009), who states that conventional research methods, the legal system, and statistical data have been found to be problematic. Duara (1995) identified how narratives could be used by individuals to explain their uniqueness as an American from an ethnic, political, religious and sexual frame of reference.

One goal for this research was for *Conversations in Black* to be read as a variant of what Critical Race Theorists refer to as a ‘counter-narrative’. Delgado and Stefancic (2001, p. 144) concisely define counter-narratives as “writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority.” Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggest that one tenet of counter-narratives or stories is to address preconceptions and identify the discrimination that people of colour experience, which often demeans them as individuals and as a group. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012, pp. 49-50):

Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated if the Race is not real or objective but constructed. Racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstruction; the pernicious beliefs and categories are, after all, our own. Powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of correction in the system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity.

For this reason, Solórzano and Yosso (2009, p. 134) emphasised that Critical Race methodologies such as counter-storytelling, are designed to challenge “ahistoricism and the undisciplined focus of most analyses... analysing race and racism by placing them in both historical and contemporary contexts.” They provide a definition (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, pg. 138) of the counter-story as:

... a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told... a tool for exposing, analysing and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege.

In *Conversations in Black*, the counter-story from the different perspectives works through the assertion of agency, voice and identity. The counter-narrative was needed to provide individuals a safe space, to no longer remain silent or blame themselves for sharing their 'life experiences' which are often silenced in majoritarian discourses of race and racism (Ladson-Billings, 2002).

Moreover, the use of counter-narrative challenges what Gilroy referred to as the "historical dimensions of Black life" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 37). In doing so, the use of Producers of Black Film in *Conversations in Black* challenges majoritarian histories or beliefs about Blackness not received or taken from a Black perspective. In this manner, I proposed a kind of meta-story using Black Film Cognition, in that it suggests co-ordinates for re-telling the perspectives of these practitioners and understanding of Black Film through their work and voice.

Critical Race Theory and Black Film Production

The introduction to Alessandra Raengo's book *Critical Race Theory and Bamboozled* addresses several important issues that need to be considered when using Critical Race Theory for this research project (2008, pp. 1-4). The first issue is that Critical Race Theory does not have official sanction or approval in Film or Media Studies but has been cautiously mentioned (as cited by Raengo) by Gerald Sim who uses the term 'Critical Race Film studies' to examine how film critics and scholars have sought to understand cinema's relationship to racial ideology. In *The Subject of Film and Race: Retheorizing Politics, Ideology, and Cinema*, Sim interestingly appropriates post-structuralist theory to address issues of multiculturalism, identity politics and multiracial discourses to bring

attention to the need for Film and Media Studies to 're-examine dominant discourses that include race, ethnicity and film' (Sim, 2014).

Another poignant issue that Raengo highlights revolves around the terminology used to identify 'Race' and scholarship that places emphasis on filming Blackness in cinema. In her estimation, the label of 'Black film studies' is the term that presents what Raengo calls a 'tense' critique of "scholarship *about* Black Film and 'Black scholarship' about the cinema" (Raengo, 2008, p. 1). What is perhaps a little more certain is that, according to Wilderson (2010) and Sim (2014) and advanced by Raengo throughout her work, Critical Race Theory conceivably occurs at the intersection between Race, Blackness and filmmaking. Therefore, Critical Race Theory adds to the body of knowledge of the various disciplines previously identified when referencing media and industry studies and attempts to address the concerns of Hesmondhalgh (2009, p. 246), bringing critical theory to any study of production. Although Hesmondhalgh emphasises social justice as one of the underlying aims for research, Raengo adequately applies Critical Race Theory to canonical approaches in critical theory to address the question of 'race' as fundamental to continued marginalisation of Black Film within Film and Media Studies (Raengo, 2008, p. 9).

Critical Race Theory has become the framework of scholars who have put Race at the centre of their inquiry in the fields of American, ethnic and women studies, education, political science and psychology (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Although Critical Race Theory draws on many disciplines for racial analysis, it also challenges them to re-examine some of their assumptions and methods to account for Race fully. Hylton (2010) references Critical Race Theory as a "*series of critiques* seeking to positively disrupt and transform racialized power relations regardless of the actors involved" (p. 338). Due to issues being addressed by the courts as a result of the Civil Rights Movement,

race and racism analysis became the focal point of view from a legal standpoint (Bell, 1992). Even though it has its beginnings in law, Critical Race Theory has grown into a movement of scholars and social activists from various disciplines interested in researching and transforming the theory to provide a critical analysis of Race and racism from a broader perspective (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Hylton, 2010; Taylor, 2009).

Current ideas about cultural production and Black Film have been shaped and re-shaped through the collective actions of individuals, by institutions and in cultural movements (Harris, 2016). As such, Black Film as an industry and a cultural movement can be seen as a significant cultural lens through which to view and explore the value systems that inform notions of and ideologies about Blackness and Race. Wilderson (2010) presented two examples of Black Cultural Production beginning with a 'first wave' of Black Film scholarship whose work theorised "emancipatory/pedagogic value of Black cinema from the text *to* the spectator." The emphasis being made here was the overreliance of scholars who focused on what Wilderson (2010, p. 84) referred to as the good/bad, positive/negative images of Black Film. Wilderson credits a 'second wave' of Black Film theorists who used various methodologies to examine the production of Black Film as a text, a discourse, and bring into this examination and exploration of Black Film. In doing so, these theorists replaced social values (authenticity or representation) as the basis of cinematic interpretation with semiotic codes and made agency, identity, ideology and voice the central questions (Wilderson, 2010, p. 87). Writing in *Race and Cinema*, Negra and Asava (2013) refer to "Hollywood as an ethnographer" with emphasis being placed on filmmakers who dramatize issues of Race through film and visual media technology. While the contributions of Black Film scholars are not to be underestimated, and indeed have been taken on by the scholars mentioned in the opening paragraphs of

this chapter, what has been neglected, minimalised or marginal in this analysis pertaining to Producers of Black Film as cultural producers and their role as individual agents within larger media structures. As Delgado and Stefancic (2012) have demonstrated, Critical Race Theory is a commitment to questioning the foundations of Race, racism, and power. This theory seeks not only to understand the social situation experienced by Blacks but also to bring about change. Critical Race Theory does not accept theoretical or practical segregation when the topic of Race is central to the knowledge base (Raengo, 2008).

More significantly for this research, the storytelling tenet of Critical Race Theory was used to acknowledge the “voices” of the participants for this study and counter-narratives when collecting data and to build on the increased focus of cultural producers interviewed for *Conversations in Black* and Media Industry approaches that favour their creative practice versus their role as labour in these industries. It should be noted that the distinction being made here coincides with the growing body of scholars (for example Vicki Mayer, Miranda J Banks and John T Caldwell) who are examining the field of production more specifically versus influential work in Media/Cultural studies looking at the political economy approaches. For example, the work of Caves, Freeman, Hesmondalgh and Mayer focused on the ‘fundamental forces and processes at work in the marketplace’ with emphasis on how various film/media industries are shaped by overarching political, economic, social and cultural factors, including how national media regulations and policies influence the operations of the companies. Mosco (2009, p. 2) defined political economy as ‘the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources.

While studies on the political economy of media share the same methodology to examine cultural producers (interviews, participant observation and ethnography), Havens, Lotz and Tinic (2009, p. 239) described political economy as having a 'jet plane view' of the media. In doing so, they suggest the detailed characteristics of who cultural producers are remain unanalysed as political approaches are interested in macro processes and underpinning structures. In contrast, this research coincides with the 'helicopter view' (Havens, Lotz and Tinic 2009, p. 234) that, they argued, emphasises the details and complexities not visible from the 'jet plane view' of political economy. Along with Caldwell, (2008), Holt and Perren (2009), Havens, Lotz and Tinic suggest cultural studies approaches using the 'helicopter view' are complementary to, and not a replacement for, political economy approaches and offer a wider, structural analysis that is not as obscured as the 'jet plane' approach. In doing so, Caldwell and Holt and Perren regard this approach as being a counter-narrative to a monolithic view of the media industries as it brings to the foreground the role of individual agent's creative practices within larger media structures, including both high-placed managers and 'below-the-line' workers (Havens, Lotz and Tinic, 2009; Caldwell, 2008; Holt and Perren, 2009).

Producers of Black Film provide an excellent platform to apply the concepts addressed by Critical Race Theory and Media Studies on cultural production. A renaissance is occurring whereby the movies are telling the Black experience in America. Many of the Black Films of today, such as *12 Years a Slave*, *The Butler*, *Fruitvale Station*, *Straight Out of Compton*, *The Birth of a Nation*, *Girls Trip*, *Get Out* and *Moonlight*, are movies created by Black and non-Black producers and actors. These movies are central to understanding the cultural lens of people in whatever disciplinary contexts used because of the contribution they make to an understanding of the Black experience in

America. The attention by the Producers of Black Film not only to the visual and aesthetics but also, to the narrative is an example of the Critical Race Theory tenet that Race is viewed to be ordinary and embedded in the cultural experiences. The filmmakers' storytelling aims to *start at* rather than *arrive at* what it means to be Black.

Each of the movies mentioned here is an excellent example to use as a case study to stage a series of theoretical interventions applying Critical Race Theory's call for counter-narratives. Ultimately, using counter-narratives would position the production context (e.g. casting, filmmaking, story, narrative and budget) to explore how Producers of Black Film depict 'Blackness' and construct/deconstruct those images through Black Film. Returning to Wilderson (2010, p. 5) who states that research to answer what is Blackness is an 'ontological question'. Referencing Western philosophy, Wilderson following Fanon (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967) states that ontology pertains to the nature of being and, throughout history, there have been objects that have come into existence (Wilderson, 2010, p. 6). In this instance, I agree with Raengo and Wilderson who suggest that the concept of Blackness is an example of being. The slaves brought to America were treated differently than people who were part of White culture. Slaves became a 'sub-person' living in unimaginable conditions. This condition created Blackness as a problem of who you are. Africans who were captured and brought to America no longer existed in regard to their country of origin. In this transitioning, people are now viewed differently as Blacks, and the Blackness produced by this transition as the mark of their captivity unavoidably puts the very concept and boundaries of what it means to be human in the *world*.

Black is a social construct; it is not biological. This creation and the social institutions defined the characteristics. One way to understand this phenomenon is that Blackness is not a part of humanity, yet it is still central to

how a group of people is defined. Also, in the scholarly disciplines that address issues of Race and Blackness, another factor has to be taken into consideration, and that is 'political ontology' (Raengo, 2008, p. 3).

The history of Black Film production as outlined by several scholars (for example, Bogle (2001), Guerrero (1993), and Lott (1999)) coincide with Critical Race Theory, and that is to tell the narrative as well as the counter-narrative of the history of people. The story of how people became to be and determine how they are represented is important to broaden the issues that impact racism and power in the United States (Delgado, 1989). In telling the story, the following tenets provide a framework for the narrative:

1. Racism is normal and not unusual in America; it is so ingrained in the culture that it becomes the norm.
2. Many of the most blatant effects of racism were addressed by the Civil Rights Movement and this period also brought about a 'colour-blindness' movement that still exists (Yosso and Salerno, 2009). Colour-blindness is believed to be the way to end discrimination by treating all people individually, without regard to Race, culture or ethnicity (Husband and Downing, 2005). It became a subtle way of not embracing the notion of equality after the Civil Rights Movement. Racism is still practiced and contributes to the misfortunes of people of colour. White Americans felt colour-blindness was helpful because it asserted that Race did not matter (Tarca, 2005); whereas, to people of colour, Race does matter because it limits opportunities, perceptions, income, etc. Furthermore, colour-blindness does not take into consideration the more mundane elements of racism that contribute to the daily misfortunes of people

of colour (the Black Lives Movement is an example of fighting this issue).¹⁹

3. The issue of 'interest convergence' has stopped racial equality. This viewpoint states that Whites are willing to give up the power they have due to privilege when it is necessary or benefits them (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013).

This background information provides an understanding of the narratives and counter-narratives formed by Producers of Black Film because the social and political ontological questions are addressed directly and indirectly during the creative process. Producers of Black Film provide a view of what this means by addressing all of the various elements in the production of the ontological differences such as the decisions to portray Blackness as being a fundamental racial paradigm in the American culture (Raengo, 2008).

Spike Lee provides two examples of a film director whose 'narrative strategy' is known because of the attention he gives to telling the story from a Black perspective. For the purpose of illustrating his attention to telling the story, it is worth highlighting the making of *She Gotta Have It* (1986), a box office success, and *Bamboozled* (2000), which was highly controversial and not well received by the public. In the making of *She Gotta Have It*, Spike Lee provides an overview of his 'narrative strategy' which is how he conceptualised the components of the story. Several criteria were used to select the narrative to form the script and implement a story that reflected the goals of the film based on the audience needs and reception, as well as problems and solutions characterisation, content messages and audio-visual imagery. Before him, the story strategy comprised four elements: story heroine, the film audience, the premise of the story problem, and the film type.

¹⁹ Tarca, K. (2005). Colorblind in Control: The Risks of Resisting Difference Amid Demographic Change. *Educational Studies*, 38(2), 99-120.

Lee indicated that he started by determining the title of the film. His second concept was to identify his primary audience. Since the heroine in *She Gotta Have It* was Black and a woman, he was able to identify his primary audience as Black Women. A survey was conducted to determine what the issues and problems his audience faced. As a result, he was very conscious of a Black audience wanting a good intelligent film, and this knowledge helped to develop the narrative. Third, he was able to identify the problem premise source. A double standard was identified as one of the problem premises because men can have sex with as many people as they choose, but it is not so for women. Finally, his fourth concept combined three areas of filmmaking that included a narrative, documentary, and experimental. The documentary concept was extremely important because he wanted the film to be a realistic portrayal of the Black experience. He also wanted an educational emphasis to illustrate Black people loving each other and their ethnicity.

In using this strategy, he was able to generate and structure and the narrative and slant the narrative to achieve desired film effects and accomplish his goals. He used the 'direct gaze' discussed in this study as a way of redefining the stereotypical images of African Americans. In doing this, Bouteba (1989) suggests the African American audience was able to identify themselves in the film and the storyline.

Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled* (2000) met with mixed reviews; however, from a film studies perspective, it mixed the visual with cultural elements. According to Raengo (2008), this movie is an excellent example for film studies to apply Critical Race Theory. The film was a satire of the 1920s Minstrel Shows, where Whites darken their faces to play Blacks in a stereotypical and demeaning manner. For this narrative, Spike Lee used satire to tell the story of a Black cast playing the roles in the Minstrel Show that whites had played earlier. Satire is a strategy used to understand, provide insights and confront

by ridiculing social and political issues. This technique amplified the issues that Blacks faced, and it was a form of confronting the negativity generated by the earlier minstrel shows. The narrative and the visual techniques used were ingenious. An example was his use of introducing earlier material juxtaposed with current-day filming techniques. As stated above, Spike Lee films are an education tool to counter the narratives of Blacks. He had a Black man (the actor) play the role of the producer of the show, who wanted to change the stereotypes of Blacks to 'positive' ones; however, the role of the manager, a White man, involved images depicted similar to the 1920s minstrel films often perceived as negative (Watkins, 1998). In this fashion, Lee uses *Bamboozled* to focus more on the internalised problems in the African American community and on intra-racism by reflecting political, social and gender stereotypes (Catana, 2017; Wiegman, 1998).

Implications and Application

Black Film Cognition

The work of Black Film Cognition has three distinct strategies:

1. Understand how Producers of Black Film perceive Black Film (definitions, aesthetics and cultural traditions).
2. Demonstrate 'agency' in story, narrative and identity.
3. Present counter-narratives through the use of Black Film onscreen and off.

Black Film Cognition is the term I employ to describe practices of those who negotiate the creative process and/or techniques that Producers of Black Film discuss as a means not only to overcome persistent barriers, but also to continually strengthen their presence and authority within the American motion picture industry. By looking across modes of production, as I discussed in my Introduction, I seek to explore the perception of Producers of

Black Film, offering instead a context that suggests that similar practices amongst minorities establish a film style that borrows from both the more formal structures of mainstream cinema and the departure of strategies found in independent cinema, and is informed by their individual experience. At the core is agency and identification; at the periphery are the mechanisms to address tensions and obstacles that may cause disruption to the production practice, be it barriers to access, perceptions of failure, or the tensions of assimilation. I use the term 'Producers of Black Film' as a moniker, so as not to define or distinguish who can make a Black Film and which can apply to any duality one may engage in the filmmaking process; for example, whether practically (director, producer or creative), or in terms of identity (Black, White, of Latin Descent or American), or both, and in whatever way those experiences inform negotiations in the production process.

I further offer a context that proposed these perspectives as counter-narratives with regard to industrial shifts in film practices and techniques with regard to Black Film from 2009 to 2017. During this period, a number of films outperformed expectations at the box office, received critical acclaim and created an integration amongst the mainstream and independent sectors, with opportunities for Producers of Black Film potentially to negotiate production and distribution strategies while maintaining creative autonomy. Black Film Cognition can potentially serve as a model for understanding and analysing racial discourse within the film industry.

To explore these ideas further in the realm of Black Film Cognition, I look to three key components as a means to map the collective practices and potential growth of Producers of Black Film:

- Black Film theory
- Black Cultural production practices
- Perspective from Producers of Black Film

Andre Seewood proposed reinvigorating the need for Black Film theory, as a catalyst for discussion and debate among filmmakers about 'Race' and how it impacts the creation and reception of film (Black Film) in his article *'Black Film Theory: Fighting the Illusions of White Supremacy in Cinematic Narration'*.²⁰ The goal would be to address how 'race' impacts the creation and reception of Black Film and Producers of Black Film by challenging the dominant ideology of mainstream cinema. In writing the *Poetics of Cinema* (2008), David Bordwell refers to this as "Cognition and Comprehension" (p. 136). Although Bordwell questions the processes enabling audiences to understand narrative films, he identifies a means to question how Black Film may be perceived through the production process. In *Slave Cinema: The Crisis of the African-American in Film*, Seewood adapted his theory to what he labels "story cognition", or by questioning "how we understand and gain pleasure from the telling of a story through the production process to create, develop and produce Black Film. In short, when we watch a film we are engaged in a "process of elaboration" that can be called story cognition, where we unconsciously fill in the gaps of a film's story based on "informal reasoning procedures". These gaps are filled in by the assumptions of the spectator, as the filmmaker uses the grammar of cinema (shots, editing and sound) to encourage the spectator to make certain assumptions to fill the gaps. Bordwell (2008), as cited by Seewood (2014), calls these assumptions cognizing, or "going beyond the information given [and] hypothesizing what is likely to happen next" (p. 137). Seewood further argues that Black Film or 'Black story cognition' then becomes segregated from those films considered mainstream due to racially-motivated questions based on what is or is not a Black Film.

²⁰ Seewood, Andre. "Black Film Theory: Fighting the Illusions of White Supremacy in Cinematic Narration – Part One." *IndieWire*, 6 Jan. 2014, www.indiewire.com/2014/01/black-film-theory-fighting-the-illusions-of-white-supremacy-in-cinematic-narration-part-one-.

The two major contributing factors are: (1) the bias towards making Black Films; and (2) story cognition (how do viewers and producers understand film). For this present research, embedded in Black Film theory would be examining how the perspective from practitioners frame these two areas of discussion, beginning with the framework of understanding how the Black image impacts creation, development, and the filmmaking process; and to build upon pre-existing film theory.

Black Film Theory

Academic critics have suggested that the term Black Film has been ambiguous in meaning and this meaning has changed since its origin in studies of Black Film (Iverem, 2007; Reid, 1993, 2005; Snead, 1988). Critics have agreed that a Black Film aesthetic exists, despite the lack of a grounded meaning of what 'Black Film' is (Bogle, 2005; Cripps, 1994; Guerrero, 1993; Hooks, 2005; Iverem, 2007; Reid, 1993, 2005; Snead, 1994). More to the point, this research pertained to how that aesthetic is perceived by producers of Black Film in the context of production, and how those elements are composed and perceived.

A recurring, and indeed central problem that resurfaces in much literature around Black Film, is the question of what exactly it is in the first place. Embedded in this question lies a further series of questions around what the production of Black Film means, to whom, in which contexts and in what moments in history. Scholars who have braved the task of providing historiography of Black Film suggest different elements as being indicators of the potential sub-genre. Consequently, the 'Black' in 'Black Film' takes on many translations. When constructing and deconstructing the Black in Black Film, a complex task is at hand as there are various interpretations of the term 'Black'. For example, Horrigan (2003) states that ethnic orientation of the

producers, writers, cast and the intended audience could be indicative of Black. Additionally, Iverem (2007) includes tone, context, content or storyline.

Although no single definition is sufficient, as all of them contain significant contradictions, Cripps (1978, p. 3) offered a good starting point for understanding the orientation of this research:

Those motion pictures made for theatre distribution that have a Black producer, director, and writer, or Black performers; that speak to Black audiences or, incidentally, to white audiences, possessed of preternatural curiosity, attentiveness, or sensibility toward racial matters; and that emerge from self-conscious intentions; whether artistic or political, to illuminate the Afro-American experience.

In writing *Black Lenses, Black Voices: African American Film Now*, Mark Reid offers a similar definition, differentiating between Black-independent and Black-commercial films and pushing the definition beyond a single author to reflect the transnational corporate realities of contemporary image-making. For this study, however, the definition of Black commercial film will be limited to any feature-length fictional movie whose central focus is the Afro-American community, written, directed, or produced by at least one Black person in collaboration with non-Black people and distributed by a major American film company.

According to Yearwood (Lott, 1997, p. 5), Race or Blackness is most certainly a constructed and extremely heterogeneous concept, but one that remains significant:

For many people, Blackness is less a color than a metaphor for political circumstances prescribed by struggles against economic exploitation and cultural domination: a state of consciousness that peoples of various pigmentations have experienced, empathized with, and responded to.

In most instances, Lott (1991) claimed that any attempt to explain Black Film, or at least to understand its major criteria, generates further discussion and debate around the political and ideological contexts that frame the concepts of Black identity and Black Film.

Even though Black Film scholars have presented specific films and their characteristics as being representative of a wider interpretative understanding of Black Film, these very distinctions seek to delimit a specific definition of Black Film that is not always congruent with other definitions. Reflecting on the works of Cripps (*Black Film as Genre*), Reid (*Redefining Black Film*), Yearwood (*Black Film as a Signifying Practice*), and Taylor (*Black Cinema Aesthetics*), Lott challenges an essentialist notion categorising Black Film by using biological categories (e.g. Black director, Black cast, Black producer) versus analysis of ideological criteria along aesthetic, historical or political lines. Moreover, Lott (1991, p. 201) suspects that “film criticism has not offered much assistance in clarifying the concept [of] Black cinema because there exist no uncontested criteria to which an ultimate appeal can be made to resolve these underlying issues.”

The group(s) of films and even discursive materials employed by practitioners continue to problematise specific definitions and instances of Black Film. However, even though essential definitions of Black Film are difficult to assume, the relevant literature makes some convincing arguments as to the ways in which one can begin to theorise contemporary Black Film. The concern for this research takes into account that earlier definitions of Black Film exclude films based on biological factors (Cripps, 1977), and/or use political/historical events to assess good versus bad imagery (Lott, 1999), essential elements such as Black art or Black music (Diawara, 1993), Black-owned versus Black-themed (Reid, 1993), or a Black ‘Afrocentric’ perspective

(Yearwood, 2000). Furthermore, Reid (2005) suggests that Black Film is composed of African American films and black-oriented film types:

African American film is any film whose central narrative explores the life and experience of the African Diaspora in the United States. [Furthermore] African American film refers only to films directed, written, or co-written by members of this community. The term 'black-oriented film' denotes similar black-focused films whose directors and screenwriters are non-black.

Reid's (2005) term 'black-oriented film types', is classified in the works of film critic Esther Iverem (2007) under the term "Other People's Movies, or OPM". This term specifies Black Films that are of some significance to the African American community that were not made by Blacks, or with Blacks in mind. Iverem (2007) also creates another sub-category under the heading of the Black Film title, which is "Movies featuring Black stars" which is also developed along the same line.

Although these competing discourses, Reid (1993) and Iverem (2007), offer myriad explanations and definitions, each view consistently identifies Producers of Black Film as the determining element when filming Blackness on-screen (Leonard, 2006, p. 21; Gillespie, 2007). This perspective may be understandable and even sensible, but the reduction or limiting of films based on these issues or criteria has been problematic and short-sighted. Black Films are produced to convey certain messages about "Blackness" and Black identity (Jiles, 2013). While the marketing of Black Film is overwhelmingly toward a Black audience, non-Blacks have access to Black Films and construct their understandings of what it means to be Black. As a result, Collins (2009) states that the images and representations of Blackness are based on some factors, none of which stands alone.

Black Cultural Production Practices

Michael Gillespie's (2007) proposal for 'Filming Blackness', and Andre Seewood's reference to Black Film Cognition (2008), offer two distinct approaches that help to analyse Black Film theory from the perspective of the producer. Both approaches contrast the analysis of Black Film as material and physical objects with the analysis of the media as texts or messages and emphasise the importance of interrogating the two to understand media's meanings and potentials fully.

Gillespie, who adapts the contested ideologies regarding identity and representation, has rejuvenated the Black Film debate by bridging the intellectual gap between understanding the conditions of Black Film production and the theoretical study of Black Film. Rather than debating what "Black" is, Gillespie believes producers should introduce elements and storylines to portray Blackness as "appealing, inclusive and marketable" (2007, p. 10). He suggests that because society has become more of a multi-racial/bi-racial culture, that to look at Race is limiting (Gillespie, 2007). As an example, in his essay "*Reckless Eyeballing: Coonskin, Film Blackness and the Racial Grotesque*", Gillespie interrogates the notion of 'Black Film'. In doing so, Gillespie advocates a shift in the conversation, moving away from notions of Black Film as a stable category and towards an understanding of "Film Blackness". This is a term he uses for "art modalities that exhibit Black visual and expressive culture". By refocusing the conversation on 'Film Blackness', Gillespie suggests this creates opportunities for new paradigms beyond the common binary analysis of good and bad imagery. To make his point further, Gillespie's reading of Ralph Bakshi's film *Coonskin* (1975) suggests that rather than "stereotyping and degrading Blacks" (as protestors and critics claimed), "the film 'reanimates' tropes of anti-Black visual culture, unfixing them from their rigid stasis" as a means to "expose the racist and fetishistic tendencies of

the American imaginary” (Mask, 2012). For Gillespie, using this concept of ‘Film Blackness’ highlights and challenges visual and discursive production of Race in film.

According to Stuart Hall, throughout his work as a cultural, political and social theorist, Black culture is a contradiction. He states, “Black popular culture is a contradictory space. It is a site of strategic contestation.”²¹ Hall believes it is an oversimplification to explain Black culture using binary terms (i.e., authentic versus inauthentic). Another issue adding to the contradiction is use of the term “Blackness”; the rejection by some African Americans of the idea that Blackness refers to skin colour, and this is an insulting characterisation for those who do not see themselves as being Black. In this study, I use Black and African American interchangeably to recognise the various labels desired by people of African descent.

From the earlier origins of Black Film, much dissension has taken place regarding what might, can, or should not be classified as Black Film. Of late, a renewed contemporary debate has re-emerged surrounding the current state of the Black Film Industry. Bass (2011) suggests that most of the commentary critiques not only the function of Black Film but also its aesthetics and values regarding Blackness. Essentially, the overarching question places the emphasis on the ways that ‘Blackness’ is perceived in accordance with how film producers, critics, and audience think that it should function, be presented, or defined. As demonstrated in Iverem’s (2007) and Reid’s (1993) assessment of Black Film, the definitions and interpretations of the term Black Film are fluid. Yearwood’s (2000) analysis of Black Film speaks to the mediation of the African American experience as narrative film texts. Therefore, for Yearwood (2000), Black Films are presented through an

²¹ Stuart Hall, “What is this ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992).

Afrocentric perspective which centralises African Americans and examines fundamental issues that are related to the existence of Blacks.

Although 'Race' is a social construct embedded in the American Culture, Julien and Mercer (1988) claim that, within media structures, limitation of diverse ethnic 'voices' constitutes a political problem. Firstly, an individual black writer or producer is perceived as a 'typified' representative of a specific culture. Secondly, minority 'voices' are contained within a 'majority discourse' that positions minorities ideologically via stereotyping. Hall (1989) suggests that, when Black people united under the political umbrella of 'Black' initially to contest issues of representation, their two primary objectives were: 1) Black artists obtaining access to the rights of representation, and 2) challenging prevailing representation and marginalisation through the creation of 'positive' black images.

Hall states that the focus of this contestation was upon the "relations of representation", whereas he proposes a move towards the "politics of representation" which heralds the end of the essential Black subject':

[B]lack is essentially a politically and culturally-constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature. What brings this into play is the recognition of the immense diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experience of black subjects. This inevitably entails a weakening or fading of the notion that 'race' or some composite notion of race around the term 'black' will either guarantee the effectivity of any cultural practice or determine in any final sense its aesthetic value (p. 443, original emphasis).

Hall stresses that the end of the essential Black subject will give rise to recognition of differences by acknowledging the multiple subject positions

found within ethnic minorities. These principles were also evident in black filmmaking practices of the 1980s. Pines (1992) noted that Producers of Black Film (Pines references Black Filmmakers) exemplified Hall's 'recontextualisation' of identity by exploiting opportunities when exploring black political and cultural issues. According to Pines, these films contested power relations that exist within mainstream cinema practice and therefore challenged conventional modes of representation of minorities originating from race relations and multiculturalism. As a result, Pines suggests 'a more sophisticated engagement with the complexities of ethnic minorities' experiences' when subverting orthodox forms of filmmaking (Awan, 2008).

An example of this practice in Mercer's (1988) analysis of film is discussed, when identifying two forms of Black filmmaking: 1) Monologic, and 2) Dialogic film. Mercer mentions *Blacks Britannica* (dir. David Koff, 1978) and *The People's Account* (dir. Milton Bryan, 1986) as examples of monologic film that follow the codes and conventions of mainstream cinema, differing only in content. *Territories* (dir. Isaac Julien, 1984) and *Handsworth Songs* (dir. John Akomfrah, 1986) were examples of dialogic film that challenges and subverts conventional cinematic codes in an attempt to eschew 'eurocentric' aesthetics (Awan, 2008). The significance of the dialogic mode is that the filmmaking process engages with critical dialogue to expose conventional cinematic codes as a product of dominant White practices. In this regard, Mercer proposed various subject positions within Black identity construct a counter-discourse to white Hegemony, as Black filmmaking becomes politicised as the dialogic strategy, and dialogic strategy contests the notion of representation and aesthetics (Mercer, 1988, 2013). For Mercer, under the dialogic mode, Black filmmaking practices are less restricted and Producers of Black Film are afforded more diverse opportunities and the 'burden of representation' can be challenged. However, there is a concern that Black Films using this strategy

may appear and be considered less appealing to mainstream audiences (Awan, 2008, Lott, 1991).

Hall (1987) argues that this radical rethinking of identity and representation, as exemplified through Black filmmaking practices, will counter the dominant discourses of nationalism and national identity. He proposes that categorisations of 'Race' grounded in monolithic and oppressive discourses are undermined when suggesting ethnicity is neither fixed nor permanent. Conversely, Gilroy (1991) identifies a danger in dismissing 'Race' as a construct, arguing that the structures of power and subordination that affect social reality continue to be organised within a racial framework. Despite Gilroy's position having validity, Hall's proposal arguably remains credible as Black filmmaking practices present micro-level challenges that contribute towards a destabilising of the macro-level ideas about 'race' and ethnicity (Awan, 2008).

Obtaining the Filmmakers' Perspective

An African Proverb once stated, "Until the lion learns to write, every story will glorify the hunter." This metaphor challenged the tendency of historians to present altered historical accounts that commonly misrepresented or ignored Blacks (Brantlinger, 1985; Pieterse, 1992; Pratt, 1986; X, 1992). This was similarly the case in early American film production. Despite the disparaging images of Blacks that were promoted by the Hollywood film industry, the Black Film industry emerged, using its power to contest widely publicised images such as those in D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (Snead, 1988).

Scholars have discussed the origins of the Black Film industry and suggest how the Producers of Black Film offered a platform where Blacks reclaimed their agency, recounted their own experiences and challenged the dominant narrative that early American films put forth (Cripps, 1993; Snead,

1988). The ability to create counter-narratives through film, often came at a high cost that most Black filmmakers struggled to afford (Iverem, 2007). Due to lack of monetary resources, funding presented an obstacle that filmmakers would have to manage in order to get their productions out to the public. Entman and Rojecki (2000), Rhines (1996) and Snead (1994) stated that many producers of Black Film received funding from White benefactors, at the expense of their creative visions by forcing them to give up full creative control of the film. The Black Film industry continues to be challenged when resorting to outside funding. For example, Todd Boyd suggests that Black Film should be described as a syncretic process. The assimilation of Blacks is not a process of acculturation, but of cultural syncretism, the merging of opposing views, practices, and philosophies (Boyd, 1991; p. 95). He states, "Black expressive cultures affirm while they protest". This research builds upon Boyd's theory to illustrate how reception and spectatorship of Black Film largely draw upon the self-definitions, characteristics and cultural expressions generating from a diverse history and politics affecting Black people. In this case, I am using 'Blackness' to refer to the ways Producers of Black Film may or may not reinforce hegemony when projecting Black Culture in film.

Although diverging from the North American context of this study, The Black Audio Film Collective's output has been variously described as "an extraordinary body of poetic, allusive, and intensely personal films, videos, and 'slide-tape texts' that chronicled England's multicultural past and present and pushed the boundaries of the documentary form" (Searle, 2007). When referencing the collective and their body of work, I envisioned trying to incorporate what was considered an expression of a "diasporic subject that seized the idea of 'blackness' as an identity marker as well as a claim to political visibility." After reviewing several of my surveys, one question that was chosen for Black Film cognition pertained to blackness and identity.

According to Guardian film critic Adrian Searle, “the works the Black Audio Film Collective reflect a tone of voice, a particular kind of filmic space that resisted categorisation.”²² Interestingly, in the article, Searle quotes Kodwo Eshun who stated their work “projected a stance of high seriousness with seductive stylishness”. The members of the collective explored and engaged with broader theoretical issues of race and representation, colonial discourse and (post)Pan-Africanist vision with the goal of recasting the question of black representation in British media as a politics of identity. Gill Henderson wrote that their films “threw out the rulebook on the dominant polarities of incomprehensible semiotics and didactic propaganda”²³. In recent years, Smoking Dogs Films was born after the group dissolved and a renewed interest in the body of films ‘legibility’ on account of contemporary evolutions and recent events in our society (Groof and Symons, 2015). Citing early works like *Expeditions* onwards, and up until collective members’ most recent films like *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013), *The March* (2013), and *Transfigured Night* (2013), Groof and Symons (2015) suggest that the films within the Black Audio Film Collective and Smoking Dog Films continue the trend of exploring political issues that address post-colonialism and racism and the question of Black identity.

An example of the filmmaker’s perspective was shared by African-American female director Ava DuVernay during an interview with Rolling Stone magazine²⁴, where she discussed the process of making the movie *Selma*. As she began the process, it was to have the end-product to be one

²² Adrian Searle, ["Voices of the rising tide"](#), *The Guardian*, 27 February 2007.

²³ Gill Henderson, foreword to *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective*, ed. Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007): 7

²⁴ Edwards, G. (2018). *Ava DuVernay on Making 'Selma' – Rolling Stone*. [online] Rollingstone.com. Available at: <https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-news/we-shall-overcome-ava-duvernay-on-making-selma-237237/> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2018].

representative of the time, the people, and her personal concerns of making a successful movie. *Selma* was a screenplay which had been ‘shopped around’ and was viewed as an ‘unmakeable’ movie. The script was about the march on Selma and ultimately the Voting Rights Act passed by Lyndon Johnson (LBJ). In her interview, listed are areas that were essential to address in the making of the film:

- **Personal Point-of-View of Director.** The movie was not just about LBJ and Martin Luther King. Consciously, a decision was made to switch the emphasis from LBJ being, as she noted, the “white saviour” to being centred on the people of Selma.
- **Casting is critical:** Having a ‘high profile’ individual such as Oprah Winfrey in the cast allowed for the freedom and flexibility of having actors who were not well-known.
- **Dramatisation of Events:** This is a film based on historical events. The concern was that it would be represented accurately and honestly. The cultural lens used to determine the events was that of an African American female. An avoidance of presenting the movie as one-dimensional or from a stereotypical view was addressed in each role.
- **Characterisation:** Actors were not to be caricature or stereotypical one-dimensional individuals. As a female African American director, she wanted to represent a real diversity of thought from the White perspective by the dominant culture. The characters each thought about their role in a different way because society is not a monolith. All Whites do not think the same as well as all Blacks do not approach a situation the same.
- **Aesthetics:** *Selma* is a violent movie. There was concern about how to portray violence in a meaningful way. She believed “you have to

bring in some context for what it was like to live in the racial terrorism that was going on in the Deep South at that time. The four little girls who were murdered had to be there, and then you had to bring in the women. So, I started adding women”.

Ava DuVernay demonstrates Black Film Cognition through her discussion of the film *Selma*. When interviewing Producers of Black Film, she exemplifies the nature of my study.

For style and tone, Marlon Riggs’ *Tongues Untied* (1989) use of performative documentary critiques the positioning of black gay culture as an ethnographic subject. Blending poetry, performance, popular culture, personal testimony and history into a text that allows the viewers to transport themselves into Riggs’ world²⁵. Riggs merges styles ranging from social documentary to experimental montage, personal narrative and lyric poetry (Mercer, 1994).

Kleinhaus and Lesage (1991, p. 20) suggest that *Tongues Untied* sets out to establish a uniform visible and audible gay black community, into which Riggs intentionally gives identity to the gay black spectator. He uses the music of Billie Holiday and Nina Simone for his soundtrack accompanied with the poetry of Essex Hemphill and Joseph Beam to provide a series of behaviour, attitudes and characteristics for the gay black spectator to adopt (Diawara, 1993). Riggs created Madonna-esque imagery that replicates the glossy black and white Vogue fashion world, with characters who use expressive and flamboyant gestures and embellished finger snapping. In this regard, Riggs demonstrates how an individual’s identity is constructed by citing characteristics and acts from a cultural field. Riggs’ documentary performers

²⁵ Berlinale 2016: Panorama Celebrates Teddy Award's 30th Anniversary and Announces First Titles in Programme. *Berlinale*. Retrieved 20 December 2015

are the material provided to constitute the spectator as a particular type of subject. They provide feelings, experiences, attitudes and strips of behaviour.

The subjects in *Tongues Untied* appear as representative of gay black men and of gay black experience. Each subject is a reification of 'blackness' (Jones, 1993). They are not isolated from the performative community but placed within relation and networks of their cultural field to help black gay men declare and validate their worth (Rucas, 2003). In this manner, Riggs is believed to have established a normative gay black identity using symbols of empowerment as cinematic text (for example: voguing, the spoken word and the Snap) that were identifiable to black/gay audiences. In Sheila Petty's article *Silence and Its Opposite: Expressions of Race in Tongues Untied*, she questions Riggs' appropriation of Laura Mulvey's notion of the gaze and recontextualises it for a homosexual audience to be seen as 'other' (Petty 1998, p. 424). The significance of Riggs' narrative for *Tongues Untied* is how the documentary is structured as a direct confrontation between black gay identity and a heterosexual white exclusionary matrix, where black gay identity is immanently callous, and grief-stricken in opposition with the dominant white heterosexual identity (Jones, 1993; Riggs, 1993; Rucas, 2003).

Applying Critical Race Theory to Black Film

Finally, in this last area of my literature review, I want to focus on the question of analytic assessment of applying Critical Race Theory to film studies. Two recent publications in a special issue of *Black Scholar*²⁶ and an 'In-focus' article in *Cinema Journal*²⁷ respectively, addressed a major criticism of Black studies and Black Film theory, which is their continued 'marginalisation'. This lack of a theoretical focus was parallel to the societal

²⁶ The Black Scholar Vol. 46.3: Blacks and Climate Justice August 29, 2016

²⁷ Volume 40, Issue 1, January 2016 The Power of Black Film Criticism *Elizabeth Reich*

avoidance of dealing with the ontological issue of Blackness for a Western frame of reference. Both articles felt that Film Studies would be more relevant when it can address Blackness and the ontological question regarding 'image' and what it means to be 'human'. This suggests that Critical Race Theory enters into Film Studies when the theoretical potential of Blackness is embraced by film studies (Raengo, 2008, p. 8).

Franz Fanon's critiques of the current philosophical framework not only acknowledged a lack of understanding of what is 'Black', but also recognised that 'Black' exists (Wilderson, 2010). When Fanon talks about the failure of 'ontology' to account for the 'Black', he also wants to criticise the inadequacy of existing philosophical frameworks to understand the existence of the 'Black' reality. He states that "Phenomenology does not explain the experience of a body marked by Race." He argues:

Marxism does not understand that in the colonial setting the base is the superstructure and it combines with Race in specific ways: you are rich because you are white, and white because you are rich; psychoanalysis, which he practised when working in a mental hospital in Algiers, has not yet figured out how to understand that a colonial relation is a form of colonization of the psyche, and so on.

Currently, a 'White' focus is the scholarly approach to Film Studies. The illusion by default is that a film is White, whereas, a movie with a Black focus is labelled and identified as a 'Black Film'. The implied subject of the cinema is still racially unmarked; however, Black Film is treated differently, as a separate genre apart from mainstream films. When discussing film using Critical Race Theory, it is still labelled Black Film studies.

Representation becomes the determining factor when labelling a film 'Racial'. Race becomes the narrative or the content. The use of Critical Race Theory in film studies is to conceptualise Race as a challenge in the film, but to

engage in Blackness on how it is expressed using aesthetics, affect, emotions and mobility. Another area of concern is to examine the ontology of the photographic image. Photographic images have a truth value and transparency. The avoidance of Blackness as an image when addressing the image of Black is a part of the narrative. When addressing what Blackness is, the image that is Black is a key consideration. Blackness is a concern because the Black image is part of the narrative.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study explores the perspectives of Producers of Black Film by placing emphasis on their production context in order to examine how they construct/deconstruct Black Film. Traditionally, the production context of Black Film, or the perspectives of those engaged in practice has generally been neglected or rarely given academic attention. This situation has led to an under-exploration or documentation, as exemplified by the growing field of industry-based approaches in Film and Media Studies, as I discussed in the previous chapter and my introduction. There has been some development to address this gap in recent years, in that film media and Critical Race Theory are questioning the racial division of labour and how that impacts Black Film.

This chapter will present the primary research methodology for the industry-based approach used for this project, and mixed-method research strategy, in order to address how my method and the presentation of my findings utilise practice. My method also involved qualitative-based interviewing (DeMarrais, 2004) to create a filmed artefact that included participant insights, ideas, reflections and reactions that help the investigator identify important trends, lived experiences, and relevant patterns of people's lives. In her definition of qualitative interview study, DeMarrais (2004, p. 52), states that it is a tool:

Used when researchers want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about a particular phenomenon, experience, or sets of experiences.

As I have detailed in Chapter 2, the growing body of work in cultural studies scholarship inspired my practice, and I will explain how Critical Race Theory as a framework for my practice addressed scholarly 'reticence' and

'unease' in respect of 'race' with regard to 'Blackness' and the experiences of Producers of Black Film. Critical Race Theory has been used by scholars to link theory and understanding about Race from critical perspectives to actual practice and actions that include activism, social justice, and change (Parker & Lynn, 2002). For the purpose of this research, the counter-narrative tenet of Critical Race Theory as described by Delgado and Stefancic (2012) was used through various stages of the study, including data collection, the filmmaking process and analysis of my findings.

To fulfil the aim of using practice-based research, that of deriving theory from practice, it was important to develop a conceptual framework grounded in real-life industry experience. As such, understanding my decision to utilise this methodology can be described as falling within an interpretative framework, as the intention is to understand how the production of a visual-based artefact provides additional insight to understanding the creative challenges when producing Black Film. Following Andrews (2004, p. 82), I chose to utilise a mixed-method approach as a means of answering the research question and to inform the design of the creative artefact. In pursuing this research, my overall objective was to create a filmed artefact that engages with, and is fortified by, the written thesis. This form of research demonstrates both practical and productive knowledge, as quoted by Tom Barone and Elliott Eisner; in their discussion of practical and productive knowledge, they offer the primary reason why this practice-based enquiry is crucial for my research:

Practical knowledge is knowledge that allows one to negotiate differences in values, courses of action and commitments, in order to resolve a particular situation that needs attention. Productive knowledge is the ability to put things together so that they work. Productive knowledge is a making of something, not simply the

ability to understand what a person has done. Productive knowledge lives in the universe of action (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 58).

In *Understanding Cinema: A Psychological Theory of Moving Imagery*, Per Persson demonstrated how filmmaking practices introduce a new theme, style or convention which transforms the way critics, authors and audiences understand literature and the rest of the world. In this case, my research will be an example of productive knowledge through the making of a film by its original content, structure, form and desired impact. The accompanying written analysis contextualises and explores the significance of that contribution to practical knowledge by critically reflecting on the final film (Arts & Humanities Research Council, 2009).

This creative research project needed a four-step process for completion. The first step required the literature review conducted in Chapter 2, analysing relevant literature and identifying problems and gaps between them. The next step was to research and create a questionnaire to conduct semi-structured practitioner interviews for the creative film component of this project; the questionnaire would employ findings from the literature while acting as a means to conduct further research in practice. The third stage involved the production of the visual artefact, which would be a filmic exploration of the Producers of Black Film selected for this study. The creation of the visual artefact is designed to examine how industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production perceive the challenges of producing contemporary Black Film. The fourth and final stage was to discuss the results of the theoretical and creative research within this practice-based project as a whole.

The methodology chosen for this research was designed to be practitioner-focused in order to explore, analyse and then reflect on the production practices these filmmakers discussed with regards to Black Film. Victor Burgin describes my research in terms of a research student "interested

in ideas and turns concepts encountered in reading into practical projects" (Burgin, 2006, p. 4). This allowed for my position as the primary researcher to take on the role of a bricoleur, performing a diverse range of research tasks; from interviewing, filming and self-reflection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 9). The research of this type of candidate typically has a mainly practical outcome, with academic work playing an "instrumental role" (Burgin, 2006, p. 4). An effort was made to create and develop a research project design that was not hindered by certain aspects of practice-based work, time (Caldwell, 2009), budgetary constraints (Burgin, 2006, p. 4), or access (Ortner, 2009), but definitely took them into consideration as I will detail in Chapter 4.

Methodology

In the following section, I will outline the primary methodological approach used to conduct this study. The methodology I have used for this research is informed by Practice-Based Enquiry (PBE), incorporating the technique of action by making a visual-based artefact that allows the practitioner/researcher to enquire into their own practice to produce accessible reports and artefacts (Murray and Lawrence 2000, p. 10). In defining my methodology as PBE, I will discuss practice-based research in order to address my different approach to practice research as a means to inform and augment theoretical examination that leads to new knowledge and insights of critical and theoretical understandings of Black Film production primarily from the United States.

Arnold describes PBE as a model where "your own creative insights, practices, problems and delights are the core data" (Arnold, 2008, p. 39). In order to develop and produce this research, I undertook a mixed methods approach that combines PBE and qualitative research comprising participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and Critical Race Theory to frame the

perceptions of practitioners who worked in the production of Black Films. Christine Cornea (2008) states that research methods utilising practitioner interviews have increased in film and television studies.

These complementary methods were chosen because they allowed my research to explore how practitioners discuss the methods they use when making Black Films. I described these frameworks and highlighted relevant concepts that support the purpose of this study. While these frameworks varied in focus, they all offered a critical lens to analyse the participants and filmmaking practices I had chosen for my thesis.

Linda Candy's distinction of practice-led and practice-based research (2006, p. 1) helped inform this process. In *practice-based research*, an original investigation is undertaken in order to gain new knowledge, partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. Originality and contributions to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes which may include artefacts such as images, music, designs, models, digital media, or other outcomes such as performances and exhibitions (Arts & Humanities Research Council, 2009). A practice-based PhD is distinguishable from a conventional PhD because creative outcomes from the research process may be included in the submission for examination, and the claim for an original contribution to the field is held to be demonstrated through the original creative work.

Practice-led research is concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice. The main focus of the research is to advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice. In a doctoral thesis, the results of practice-led research may be fully described in text form without the inclusion of a creative outcome. The primary focus of the research is to advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice. Practice-led research

includes practice as an integral part of its method, and often falls within the general area of action research. The doctoral theses that emerge from this type of practice-related research are not the same as those that include artefacts and works as part of the submission.

The decision to film interviews with the practitioners involved with Black Film production is an example of practice-led research. As a result, this research is able to explore theory from the practitioners' perspective and thereby add to the literature on Black Film production. This perception gained through the professionals' reflections allows for a more informed and detailed knowledge to be constructed (Candy, 2006, p. 2). The completed visual artefact is an example of Candy's practice-based research. The creative production contributes to knowledge in and of itself. Utilising the producer's self-reflective account of the production process illustrates the theory embedded in practice. Therefore, these definitions help design the nature of this practice in the initial review of literature on Black Film theory, Media Industry studies and production cultures, and then the practice of making a visual artefact on Black Film.

This research followed Ryan's definitions of reflexivity and reflectivity when pursuing practice-based research: "To be reflexive, participants (practitioners) investigate their interactions via introspection as they occur, and in the reflective mode, participants reflect on various elements (verbal, non-verbal, feelings, and thoughts) following the action" (Ryan, 2005). In the interviews with producers about their work, they were asked to reflect on processes they employ when developing Black Film: what sort of ideas they select to develop; what is the most effective way to tell a story about that idea; and how they choose the elements of the documentary (e.g. interviews, dramatisation, sounds, music). Asking these questions encouraged reflections

that complied with Schön's idea of reflection-in-practice that practitioners might do (Schön, 1983, p. 62).

Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were designed to gain the perceptions of people who work 'above-the-line' during the creative and development process of making a film. Bloore (2014) stated, that the utilisation of interviews by practitioners has gained support as a research method in Media and Film Studies (cited in Cornea, 2008, p. 117), and allowed for academic exploration of ethical and methodological issues (Mills, 2008; Mayer, 2008). This research argues that knowledge generated from an insider or practitioner's point of view is vital, as it completes the total body of knowledge and understanding about what is 'going on' for the practitioner during the production of a creative activity (McIntyre, 2006, p. 1).

The filmed project will include the following 'above-the-line' positions within the definition of a producer of Black Film content: director, producer, production designer/wardrobe, actor, cinematographer, writer, and editor. As I will discuss below, these individuals act as 'gatekeepers' and represent above-the-line positions throughout the filmmaking process. The perspective of these individuals is an area where current research is limited or absent as presented (see Chapter 2: literature overview). There have been ongoing discourses around the theoretical constructs exemplified in the making of Black Film. Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (1987) stated that the intent of qualitative research is to understand a specific social situation, event, role, group or interaction. As the investigator, I entered the interviewees' world and, through ongoing interaction, pursued their viewpoints. Semi-structured interview questions were used, based upon Makagon and Neumann (2009), to:

- Obtain data based on the participants' own categories of meaning.
- Study a limited number of cases in depth.

- Describe a complex phenomenon.
- Determine the meaning of data based on the participants' own categories.
- Provide individual case information.
- Analyse cross-case comparisons.
- Understand the description of people's personal experiences of phenomena (i.e. the emic or insider's viewpoint).
- Describe in rich detail, phenomena as they are situated and embedded in local contexts.
- Identify, by the researcher, the contextual and setting factors as they relate to the phenomenon of interest.
- Study dynamic processes (i.e. documenting sequential patterns and change).
- Determine how participants interpret constructs (e.g. industrial barriers, IQ).
- Collect data usually in naturalistic settings in qualitative research.

The interviews are structured to answer the research questions. The following three key questions explore what occurs during the production of Black Film, starting with the concept which drives the production process:

1. How does understanding Black Film Production as a creative practice vary across different industrial contexts, careers, development and production processes?
2. How do those practitioners discuss, accept or reject the notion of a 'Black Film'?
3. How does the application of Critical Race Theory help us understand the motivations of Producers of Black Film content and aid the creation of an audio-visual artefact?

To supplement my written analyses, interviewees will be filmed so that their responses can be used in the making of an artefact. Three key questions will address the following issues:

1. How can the perspectives from Producers of Black Film be defined in terms of Critical Race Theory and which counter narratives account for the aims and practices throughout the filmmaking process, as they experience them?
2. How does the concept of 'Black Film Cognition' assist in analysing and engaging with Producers of Black Film to explore issues within and throughout the production of Black Film?
3. How can the creative audio-visual artefact be used to dramatize the issues that Producers of Black Film face during the development and production process?

Filming Interviews

Interviews are film participants for the creative component of this project. The interviews are intended to engage with findings from the literature, while acting as a means to 'script' and 'storyboard' the film narrative (Saldano, 2003).

Production of Film

In conjunction with filming the interviews, the film 'script' and 'storyboard' will inform the ongoing production by combining performative/narrative documentary practices designed to dramatize the interviews.

Analysis of Making the Creative Artefact

The final stage is to use the framework of Critical Race Theory to analyse the making of the final artefact.

Theoretical Framework Relied Upon

Qualitative Research

The intention of qualitative research is to understand a specific social situation, event, role, group or interaction (Locke, Spirduso and Silverman, 1987). Denzin and Lincoln (2003), Seale (2004), and Silverman (1997) provide overviews of qualitative research from various perspectives. In principle, qualitative research is an analytical process where the researcher regularly makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, duplicating, cataloguing and classifying the object of study (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Marshall and Rossman (1989) recommend that this entails engagement in the daily life of the situation that has been chosen for the study. The investigator goes into the informants' world and, through ongoing interaction, seeks the informants' viewpoints and connotation.

The visual artefact's narrative structure was designed to capture and record first-hand participation and dialogue from these respondents. In this instance, it would include the following: How do they interpret Black Film? What are their overall perceptions, and how do they give voice to the text regarding Black Film in their own work? The methodological aim of this research is guided by the individuals' perspective about their practice being central to understanding their experiences (Little, 1991).

Critical Race Theory

This study utilised Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an analytical framework in order to examine how Race plays a role within filmmaking practices. The premise of CRT is that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture and perpetuates the marginalisation of people of colour (UCLA School of Public Affairs/Critical Race Studies, 2012). The use of CRT in my study builds on existing cultural studies approaches emphasising Race to

understand issues surrounding Blackness from the perspective of those being interviewed. This theory provides the opportunity to interpret the portrayal of events within Black cultures outside a dominant societal viewpoint (Chapman, 2006, p. 158). The use of CRT in this context aids the critical analysis of the perceptions and challenges of Producers of Black Film on how they construct/deconstruct those issues.

The use of narratives and storytelling provides a 'platform' for people of colour who have different experiences and histories with oppression and are therefore able to communicate to their White counterparts a unique perspective that those individuals cannot see or comprehend by themselves. Two objectives form the basis for the individual story, and that is: 1) to have a person of colour tell their story of discrimination, and 2) to "shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414).

The first goal of storytelling is to share the emotions of what discrimination feels like. The underlying outcome is to hear from the story how it felt to be a victim of discrimination, and to inspire in the listener feelings of sympathy, inciting an awareness and impacting an individual's conscience (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). The second goal is to create doubt about an uninformed optimistic view that most Whites share; namely, that the US has made satisfactory progress regarding racial equality. There is an underlying assumption that to continue to discuss race is divisive and counter-productive (Delgado and Stefancic, 1998).

The history and discrimination are different for each ethnic minority group in the United States. Their story is best told from their viewpoint when communicating with the dominant group, especially when they may not understand the factors involved in discrimination (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Taylor, 2009). The 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* (*The Clansman*) used the 'dominant gaze' to project stereotypes and biases as truths against Blacks.

Whereas 100 years later, the 2016 remake by a Black producer, director and actor, exemplified Critical Race methodology to “redirect the dominant gaze” to produce and create the story of Nate Turner, a freed slave who fought his way to freedom. This narrative is one method to “redirect the dominant gaze” and “make it seen from a new point of view to what has been there all along” (Taylor, 2009, p. 8). The negative impact of ‘colour-blindness’ can be addressed through narratives, according to Taylor (2009), who states that conventional research methods, the legal system, and statistical data have been found to be problematic. Duara (1995) identified how narratives could be used by individuals to explain their uniqueness as an American from an ethnic, political, religious and sexual frame of reference.

One goal for this research was for *Conversations in Black* to be read as a variant of what Critical Race Theorists refer to as a ‘counter-narrative’. Delgado and Stefancic (2001, p. 144) concisely define counter-narratives as “writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority”. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggest that one tenet of counter-narratives or stories is to address preconceptions and identify the discrimination that people of colour experience, which often demeans them as individuals and as a group. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012):

Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated if the Race is not real or objective. Constructed racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstruction; the pernicious beliefs and categories are, after all, our own. Powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of correction in the system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity (pp. 49-50).

Solórzano and Yosso (2009, p. 134) emphasise that critical race methodologies, such as counter-storytelling, are designed to challenge “a historicism, and the undisciplinary focus of most analyses... analysing race and racism by placing them in both historical and contemporary contexts”. They define the counter-story as “... a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told... a tool for exposing, analysing and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solórzano and Yosso, 2009, p. 138).

In *Conversations in Black*, the counter-story from the different perspectives works through the assertion of agency, voice and identity. The counter-narrative also provided individuals with a safe space to no longer remain silent or blame themselves for sharing their ‘life experiences’, which are often silenced in majoritarian discourses of race and racism (Ladson-Billings, 2002). Moreover, the use of counter-narratives challenges what Gilroy referred to as the “historical dimensions of Black life” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 37). In doing so, the use of Producers of Black Film in *Conversations in Black* challenges majoritarian histories or beliefs about Blackness not received or taken from a Black perspective. In this manner, I proposed a kind of meta-story using Black Film Cognition, in that it coordinates for re-telling the perspectives of these practitioners and understanding of Black Film through their work and voice.

The Systems Model of Creativity

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s systems model is a way to try and measure creativity and how it happens. He has proposed a model of creativity that asserts that creativity results from the dynamic operation of “a system composed of three elements: 1) a culture that contains symbolic rules, 2) a person who brings novelty into the domain, and 3) a field of experts who recognise and validate the innovation” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 6). This

theory has also been termed a congruence model for creativity, because the merging of the three elements impacts the final product. The model is an analytical tool as it assists practitioners/researchers in exploring their level of engagement within their disciplines of practice (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 6). My work is informed by the systems model of creativity, placing emphasis on the domain (Black Film), the field (film production), and the individual (me, as the practitioner). My work is influenced by the ethnographic filmmaking style pioneered by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronique d'Un Été* to position the filmed interviews as "subjects as representations of discourse" (Maras, 2004, p. 95). Additionally, during the filmmaking process, the interviews are utilised throughout the process as 'conversations', whereby the responses of those interviewed are representative of discourse. The creation of this artefact seeks not only to use the interviews to provide context and detail, but also to gain critical engagement. The aim is not to provide a mere replication of documentary filmmaking practices, but to use the self-reflexive practice to combine elements of ethnography,²⁸ dramatizing data²⁹ and self-performance³⁰ to actively interrogate my primary research question.

The analysis for this research is divided into three sections, to mirror the components of the system's model. The domain will be the first component to be analysed, specifically examining Black Film theory. The importance of this analysis is to map out how Black Film and filmmaking practices are discussed within theory and industrial practices. Providing an overview of this domain knowledge confirms my 'habitus'; a form of embodied knowledge that is drawn on and reproduced through practice (Bourdieu, 1993). The two

²⁸ A blend of documentary and fictional film in the area of visual anthropology where fictional narrative is based on the primary characters as well as improvised scenes to help tell the story.

²⁹ This has been referred to as Intervention through Re-enactment as seen in Robert Flaherty's *Nanook Of The North*.

³⁰ A form of auto-ethnography where the director becomes the performer.

prominent domains I have identified are, firstly, the body of knowledge regarding Black Film theory and, secondly, the domain of film production practices. By immersing myself in the domain of Black Film theory, I would be fulfilling the first stage of documentary research and development that is traditionally engaged in by filmmakers. This immersion takes the form of reading journals, articles, scholarship and listening to debates about Black Film in order to construct a working template for this project's filmed narrative (Saldana, 2003).

The second section of analysis is the field. The field, according to Csikszentmihalyi, is constituted by all those who can affect the structure of the domain and the person. Fields are therefore powerful agencies and they "will differ in the stringency of their selective mechanisms, the sensitivity of their gatekeepers, and the dynamics of their inner organizations" (Csikszentmihalyi and Sternberg, 1988, p. 331). For this research, the field consists of those who act as agents or constituents of Black Film production. Essentially, the latter analysis is about how field opinions are mediated by me as practitioner through the production of the visual artefact. Skills in mediating field opinions, and also my own self-reflective decision-making process, become a crucial part of my practice-based research. In this regard, it is argued that the ability to be self-reflexive stems from examining the domain and the opinions of the field (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995).

The third section of analysis based on the systems model is that of the individual, which specifically analyses my 'creative practice'. The filming of interview questions and the production of the final artefact for this research are informed by personal and professional experience working in TV and film in the areas of creative development, television programming, associate producing, TV/film production management, casting talent representation and management, for over twenty years. Documentary theorists argue that a

practitioner's role in shaping and interpreting the narrative is at the heart of documenting creativity (Bill Nichols, 1981). In *The Production of Entertainment Media*, Amanda D. Lotz and Horace Newcomb (2012) present two levels of analysis or approaches to production studies that this research will specifically address, by interviewing 'individual agents' and considering how they discuss 'specific industrial contexts and practices'. Bloore (2014) refers to this as a hermeneutic and synthetic approach which, in this case, is based on my experience and ability to observe, participate and understand how the field operates during the interview process and then the making of the artefact (Bloore, 2014, p. 61). This approach then seeks to replicate initial research conducted by Caldwell (2008) and Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011), who use interviews, observation and industrial analysis of practitioners, placing emphasis on their perspectives and experiences.

Preparing the Visual Artefact: *Conversations in Black*

As I have noted, the visual artefact for this project explored and interrogated the production processes from those engaged in the creation and development of Black Film. The core methodological understanding for this research combines filming techniques with qualitative interviews and participant observation to help enhance the performative and narrative function of this work. The participants for this project work in various capacities: director, producer, writer, cinematography/editor, actor, and production design and wardrobe. I used the film to document and then record how these participants respond to questions about Black Film, from defining it to how they develop it and produce it.

To illustrate this first stage of the film's development process, the first method that was used to answer the research question replicates Caldwell's

use of ethnography³¹, combined with my use of filmmaking to ‘capture’ and explain how these practitioners detail their experiences. Gray (2003, p. 96) stated that the main purpose of the interview is to collect ideas, not only data; therefore, interviews were undertaken in order to gather data about the topic area for the research study. This included in-depth interviews with a small cohort, in order to offer useful insights into a topic to “understand human action or experiences” within a group of people from the perspectives of the people studied (Weerakkody, 2009, p. 28). The questions asked in the interviews directly relate to the three sections listed below, and how each participant responded, provided context, detail, and critical engagement. The aim then, was not simply to provide a replication of documentary filmmaking practices but to use the self-reflexive practice to combine the elements of ethnography³² to actively interrogate my primary research question. I decided that the visual artefact would interrogate these three concepts based on the responses and stemming from the literature.

1. Section 1: What is Black Film?
2. Section 2: Story and Narrative
3. Section 3: Agency, Identity and Diversity

The second method utilises five components of participant observation (Merriam, 1988, p. 19-20):

1. The focus of the research is on the process rather than outcomes.
2. The research has an interest in meaning – how people make sense of their lives, or what is happening around them.

³¹ In Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television, Caldwell is interested in the industrial and social group represented by film and television workers below-the-line, and the interpretative frameworks that inform self-analysis of their creative practice ironically Race is not one of those frameworks.

³² a blend of documentary and fictional film in the area of visual anthropology where fictional narrative is based on the primary characters as well as improvised scenes to help tell the story.

3. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and the data is mediated through this instrument.
4. The research is descriptive, seeking meaning or understanding,
5. The research is inductive, building concepts, theory, and abstractions from the details.

Creswell (2003) situates participant observation as part of the broader qualitative research paradigm (as stated by Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), because the researcher serves as the primary instrument for observing and collecting data. For this study, my process of participant observation required me to become involved with the filming of the research as a participant, in order to make descriptive observations of myself, of the people I interviewed, and then of the filming methods and techniques I used to create the artefact (Spradley, 1980). Furthermore, Spradley stated that the extent to which I (as the researcher) became involved needs to be made explicit. The degree of involvement, both with people and in the activities, will vary considerably between researchers and between events, and the researcher must decide on the extent of participation. Morrison (2002) suggests five types of participation on a scale of involvement:

- Complete
- Active
- Moderate
- Passive
- Non-participation

For this research, I would be classified as having 'complete' involvement based on my use of questionnaires, and filming and editing the images when creating the visual artefact for this research.

The third method combines the performative and narrative function of documentary. As discussed in *Blurred Boundaries*, Bill Nichols writes:

The performative function of films utilises multi-pronged, multi-mode, novel and fresh formats that take advantage of progressive strategies, which include the creative use of found footage (perhaps by adding new narration tracks or reframing), the inclusion of the filmmaker's presence and performance within the film, re-enactment, recreation, the development of visually dominant text, and a well-crafted use of voice (pp. 93 -95).

As such, the performative mode engages the filmmaker to the story but constructs 'subjective truths' that are significant for my filmmaking process (Bruzzi, 2000). Bruzzi argues that this mode of documentary is in direct opposition to proponents of 'direct cinema', who were "purveyors of the truth they pursued". More importantly, however, the performative-focused methods allow for detailing the perspectives of my participants by offering the chance to film their unique perspectives without having to argue the validity of their experiences. When developing the narrative beyond the interviews, this performative nature of documentary establishes a means to discuss how my filmmaking process combines functions of the performative mode of documentary with the narrative structure, which Toni de Bromhead refers to as "relationship to the represented" in her book *Looking Two Ways* (1996). This does contrast De Bromhead from Nichols, as she criticises his use of documentary as a means of 'rational' discourse that problematises 'objectivity' and 'truth' to focus on issues of narrative constructed beyond words alone, merging together image, sound, action and structure to produce meaning. De Bromhead's objection prefers to situate the cinematic qualities of documentary over the 'subjective truth' that Nichols utilised while discussing the various modes of documentary theory (Nichols, 2001). The rationale for combining these methods is that, through these competing differences, my role as filmmaker/academic mediates both the performative and narrative structure

by linking industry perspective with regards to the filming of the artefact being made. Therefore, I decided that my visual artefact would be a combination of, and critical comment upon, the interviews and questionnaires that I received and the literature I have reviewed, as well as creating an intellectual argument “presented in the form of a film or video as in a more conventional written form” (Burgin, 2006, p. 6).

The fourth method utilises found footage for the purposes of compilation, collage and appropriation during the editing process, drawing upon William Wees’ framing of found footage in his book *Recycled Images*. Wees addresses the use of montage when discussing found footage as a particular type of film editing and its function within critical representation. Making reference to Soviet traditions inspired by and contrasted by Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin, Wee states the following:

To open the door is one thing; to go through it and confront the media on their own ground – the manipulation of images – is another thing, and the filmmakers most likely to take this further step are those who draw most heavily on the resources of montage.

My reuse of images relies heavily on the construction of the interviews, where the focus was on the practitioners and their process for making and developing film. Therefore, each interview was structured in relation to the aims of the overall study, with the use of images to help contrast words spoken for comparison and to inform the artefact’s narrative style. Due to some complications that challenged the filming of interviews or obtaining more succinct information from respondents, the use of found footage through recycled imagery and montage in this project informs the performative function. Therefore, my artefact uses image organisation to demonstrate my ‘conscious intention’ when using editing techniques, to ‘represent one object in

terms of another' to enhance the viewers' understanding about the actions and perspectives given from these respondents and observations.

Process for the Collection of Data

This research targets individuals and filmic processes that specifically have been key figures in producing Black Film (Weerakkody, 2009, p. 167). I produced a survey for the participants also to specify any other positions they may have held that do not fall within the positions previously listed. These Producers of Black Film content needed to have released at least one film or were in the process of creating, developing or producing a film for future release. For the purpose of this research, those persons identified as academic or critic and who provided a sample of writing, published an article, taught or theorised Black Film were considered for this study. Overall, those participants who have critiqued, theorised, created, produced or developed Black Film are identified as preferred persons of interest.

Definition of Analysis Unit

The units of analysis for this study were filmmakers who were at least 18 years of age. The researcher included all of the positions detailed above within the definition of a filmmaker. The survey allowed the filmmaker to specify any other crew or career positions that did not fall within the positions previously listed as Producers of Black Film (Merton, Fiske and Kendall, 1990, pp. 12-13). The filmmaker needed to have released at least one film or be in the process of creating a film for future release.

For the purposes of this study, those I refer to as academics or critics of Black Film have written, taught, theorised or published articles on or about Black Film. I will interview and analyse these individuals as evidence, because of their relationship (academically, professionally and critically) to Black Film

or Black Films' target audience, and their ability to utilise a majority Black cast by writing directing and producing to construct themes and stories involving Black culture.

Data Collection Procedures

The participants for the study were initially solicited through word of mouth, face-to-face meetings, Internet web searches from Black Film-related websites, and social networking applications such as Twitter and Facebook. The researcher made contact with filmmakers and producers through work experience, attending screenings for their films, or through archival footage, YouTube clips, and online interviews from conferences and film festivals that occurred during the data collection period. Weerakkody suggests using this method when the researcher is interested in a limited topic area and has some idea of what he or she is looking for (Weerakkody, 2009, p. 167). For this research, I was able to obtain participation from and through a variety of sources as outlined above. For those respondents with whom I did not have a relationship, I introduced myself by giving them a short synopsis regarding the study. They were provided with the researcher's contact information and a written description of the study (see Appendix C), in an effort to set up a future meeting or to finalise the interviews. Some views and perspectives were gathered from participants through social networking websites, generated from the interviews with my initial respondents. The researcher searched for filmmakers and producers on each of these websites and then privately made contact with them from their personal profiles.

The researcher also made contact with possible participants through email addresses and the *Contact Us* functions provided on the filmmakers' personal websites. Social networking accounts were used in recruitment solely for the sake of making private invitations via internal or direct messaging. At

no point did the researcher use these applications to solicit participation in a public manner, such as posting on a filmmaker's *Facebook Wall* or through *Tweets* on Twitter that may have been seen by the public. Public contact was not made so as not to threaten the confidentiality of those who elected to participate.

Data Analysis

According to Johnny Saldana, data can be performed through characters, staging, props and scenery (Saldana, 2008a; 2008b). His use of ethno drama is arguably an innovative means to convey findings by dramatising data when using interviews, transcripts, field notes, journal entries and other written artefacts to structure a narrative scenery (Saldana, 2008b). The interviews were filmed and analysed by sorting the answers into themes. The themes were based on the qualitative and semi-structured interview process. The questions were determined prior to the interview by the researcher, seeking comments on the many production steps involved in making Black Film (e.g. research, interviewing, scripting and editing). The participant responses dictated how much time was spent on each topic and how deeply it was explored. The semi-structured interview format allowed the interviewees to expand on the many areas associated with the filmmaking process. The surveys I created, in addition to the filming of interviews, provided interrogation strategies when using the responses as a form of 'circumstantial evidence' to help inform the accompanying filmed artefact, and for drawing conclusions in the written thesis based on what these practitioners, and my practice, used for this research (Hare, 2008). More important than simply using the interviews to describe these processes, the respondents also analysed and reflected on their roles as practitioners, as well as more abstract areas such as defining Black Film, film aesthetics, and framing

Blackness. There are obvious difficulties associated with interviewing, surveying and filming participants. Therefore, I designed a mixed methods approach; merging qualitative research methods, surveys, some interviews, reference to other relevant documents, and limited observation activities. Nevertheless, I have undertaken this original work in an attempt to add something of pragmatic value to the field of practice-based research, Black Film theory and Media and Film Studies.

Validity of Data Gathering

The methodology adopted to create the visual artefact is qualitative and includes narrative and performative functions of documentary and an ethnographic form of practice-based research, whereby discovery and expression of the outcomes has involved processes associated with film production for the creation of the data and for the dissemination of the findings. Interviewing was chosen as a means of collecting data for this study because of the flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews. The aim of filming the interviews was to document reflections and opinions of Black Film producers talking about their practice. A questionnaire would have been limiting for this study, as the researcher wanted to encourage the participants to think about and describe their work experiences. Since the participants were themselves practitioners, and therefore used to the filmic process as a method of collecting people's ideas, opinions and emotions, it was decided that recorded interviews would be the most effective approach.

Andrea Fontana and James Frey (2003) state that research interviews have many different purposes, forms and focus. In ethnography, the use of qualitative research can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured; engagement can be short interchanges or occur in multiple face-to-face sessions. Merton et al. suggest that the main reason to choose an interview

over a questionnaire is to uncover a “diversity of relevant responses” (Merton, Fiske and Kendall, 1990, pp. 12-13). Makagon and Neumann (2009), and Kvale (1996, p. 1), state that the use of the filmed interviews allows the viewer to “hear culture in practice” by choosing the interview to understand “the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived worlds prior to scientific explanations.”

Returning to the Nichols, Bruzzi and De Bromhead debate regarding ‘truth’, the use of film was chosen in order to capture and document the interviews, to authenticate the data. The use of film became a useful tool for discovery and validation (Kvale, 1996). Saldana’s work on dramatising data informed how I used the filming of the interviews to document non-verbal behaviour and communication, such as facial expressions and emotions. Film allows this research to take advantage of new methods of seeing, analysing and undertaking the qualitative and ethnographic research (Hare, 2008).

Ethical Considerations

Before any interviews were conducted, the interviewees were informed about their rights to anonymity, but with a request that they consent to being identified. They all agreed to be identified in the study and signed the consent form. Creswell (2009) indicates that participants and the sites for research need to be respected as data is collected. Because many ethical issues can occur during this stage of research, it becomes important not to place participants at risk as well as respect vulnerable populations. For this study, this proposal was reviewed by the ethics committee to assess the potential for risk: physical, psychological, social, economic or legal harm to the participants I have identified or indicated for this study. In writing this proposal, my research followed the university’s policies to ensure the rights of all

participants were properly respected, and to ensure adherence to appropriate practices set forth by the University of East Anglia.

Lindlof and Taylor (2010) state that ethical issues of qualitative research do not differ from other forms of social science approaches. Although considered 'low risk', various challenges may arise based upon the relationship between investigator and participant in qualitative-based interviews. These challenges may be caused if, or when, questions delve into illegal or otherwise incriminating activity, matters of personal privacy (e.g. sexual practices), mislead, misrepresent or distort past events that have caused psychological trauma (e.g. a rape incident). In order to minimise these ethical concerns in this research, the following steps were taken:

- Prior to inviting subjects to participate in this study, the researcher was reviewed and approved by the University of East Anglia (UEA) Ethics Committee, by submitting an ethics-based research proposal with all supporting documents.
- In compliance with ethics committee guidelines, and in accordance with UEA policy on research including participants, every respondent was given informed consent forms and made aware of their rights to protections under federal, state, and university laws. Per their agreement, the researcher would receive permission to use information obtained in the interviews for the purpose of the study.

The steps included an informed consent form with identification of the researcher, the university where the research was being conducted, how participants were selected, the purpose of the research and benefits to participants if any, a risk assessment, confidentiality guarantee to the participants, rights to withdraw from research, and contact details if participants have questions or concerns (Creswell, 2009).

Conclusion

In Chapter 5, I will address the limitations and any significant problems that may have impacted the methodology I have presented in this chapter. The goal of this chapter was to describe and discuss the methods I have chosen to address the production of *Conversations in Black*.

More importantly, I outlined how the visual artefact's narrative structure was designed to capture and record first-hand participation and dialogue from these respondents. The process for this was a practice-based methodology that combined qualitative research: interviewing, ethnographic filmmaking, the use of found footage and participant observation. This methodological framework utilising qualitative research and Critical Race Theory was presented as a means to explain the design for preparing the visual artefact and dramatising the data for the current study. The performative and narrative documentary was discussed to outline how the visual artefact will be used to interpret visually how these respondents experience and practice making of Black Film.

The method for this research does not claim to be based entirely on a large representative sample, and was partially dependent on existing contacts, referrals and recommendations, and influenced by the self-selection of those who agreed to be interviewed or participated in this study. This can best be understood as my role as practitioner-researcher and how I engage, explore and then create an artefact to negotiate different views on the relationship between filmmaking practices and Black Film.

With the growth of the creative industries, and their progress as an area of pedagogy and research within academic scholarship, it has become clear that the traditional definitions of research do not always suit the guidelines for practice-based disciplines. It was deemed the best way for me to research the culture and practices of these producers was to investigate how they construct

and use their knowledge and how they link those perspectives to the filmmaking process. Therefore, using the film to present perspective, it was in order to ask questions of some of the practitioners in an in-depth, semi-structured and 'peer-to-peer' manner. Furthermore, the use of practice-based methodology was to make an original and practical contribution to this largely ignored topic of producing Black Film. Although the existing research is very limited in nature, the design of the visual artefact helps to identify, compare, and map dominant and emergent filmmaking practices from these perspectives.

In Chapter 4 of this thesis, following Candy's definitions of practice-based research, I reflect on the making of the filmed artefact to contribute to knowledge by its structure, form and impact. The context and significance of that contribution are explained in Chapter 5; however, "a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the "creative outcomes" (Candy, 2006, p. 1). This self-reflective approach allows the reader to understand the production process, and for me as the researcher to analyse my own filming practices as I developed and produced the visual artefact.

Part II: Practice-Based Research – Research Through Practice

This PhD research is in two parts. In Part I, the Introduction, along with Chapters 2 and 3 serve to example research on Practice. In Part II of this research, Chapters 4 and 5 reflect on the production of the filmed component that I have titled *Conversations in Black*. *Conversations in Black* is a creative artefact developed through the lens of the filmmaker who produced it, thereby evidencing research through practice. The remaining chapters have been designed not only to reflect on the practice but to report my findings and analyse them. As the nature of this research concerns the lack of voice from producers of Black Film, this self-reflective approach allows the reader to gain an understanding of my production process. In contrast, Peters (2005) expressed a viewpoint that the finished work of a film replicates research.

Although viewing the creative artefact as central to understanding the overall research project about producers of Black Film, it has always been my position that what I am researching is the production process from a perspective lacking in Media and Film Studies. It is my desire that this research would increase my knowledge of opportunities for different approaches to filmmaking as academic research (Geuens 2007; Schön 1983, p. 310). Conversely, while this research is informed by my practice, it is also concerned with giving voice to producers of Black Film and aims to contribute towards efforts to add to the insights and scholarship pertaining to Black Cultural Production.

Chapter 4: Conversations in Black - Reflecting on the Practice

Introduction

In this chapter, I want to present the story and narrative while making the film I have called *Conversations in Black*. My reflections on my filmmaking practice are informed by Critical Race Theory and explore visually my interest in Black Film Cognition as I have presented in Chapter 2 as the first part of the thesis. Critical Race Theory forms the framework for my analysis and discussions about the production process when developing *Conversations in Black*. Whereas Part I of this thesis deals with practice-based research, i.e. research *on* Black Film and Critical Race Theory, Part II of the dissertation takes the information examined in Part I and applies it to the actual practice of making a filmed artefact as an example of research *through* practice (or practice-based research).

For this research, this chapter outlines in a reflective manner the processes and influences that shaped aspects of the creative practice which resulted in the making of the film *Conversations in Black*. As outlined in my introduction, this thesis had creative practice as part of its design from its inception, and the research that followed always had a 'film' component figured into it. Just what kind of 'film' it would be was not clear at the beginning, and identifying its form and approach was part of the process for the overall research. This chapter details aspects of the creative process used to contextualise the production that resulted in the final creative project for this research.

Each production step contains issues embedded in the production process which require actions and decisions by the producer. During the pre-production process, a significant focus of the creative development of this

research was on applying four of six basic tenets of Critical Race Theory to the Study of Media and Film. My primary goal was to research how producers of Black Film, largely absent from the study of media or film, address Blackness and issues of 'Race' during film production. By pulling apart the production around visually displaying Black Film Cognition and using the product of *Conversations in Black* to demonstrate the participants' responses as counter-narratives, such embedded theories within this practice become evident during the editorial process for *Conversations in Black*.

Throughout the development of this research, Black Film and the discussion about the industry perception of Black Film production has been heightened by the industry-related indicators, such as the box office success of several films not only featuring Black actors and actresses but also directed by several Black and non-Black directors as well³³. For example, two of these films were awarded Academy Awards. In 2014, Steve McQueen's film *12 Years a Slave* (2014) was awarded the very first Academy Award for Best Picture, making it the first Black Film and Black director to be awarded the American film industry's highest honour in 86 years of the telecast. In 2017, the film *Moonlight* (2016) was awarded Best Picture at the 89th celebration of the Academy Awards. The significance of both films receiving such acknowledgement follows indicators of success (see reference to Littman, McKenzie and Ndounou). Consequently, in 2015, the #OscarSoWhite³⁴ hashtag was created after Academy Voters failed to nominate people of colour, including Ava DuVernay who would have been the first African American woman nominated for Best Director for the Martin Luther King-inspired biopic

³³ It should be noted that while these indicators suggest a film was 'successful', there is no correlation or context that explains why other films released during this period were not. Lang, B. (2015). Oscar Nominations Expose Oscars Lack of Diversity. *Variety*. [online] Available at: <http://variety.com/2015/film/news/oscar-nomination-selma-snub-diversity-1201405804/> [Accessed 15 Sep. 2016].

Selma (2015). While the protest largely targeted the lack of diversity in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for the last two years, for this research, the ongoing conversation throughout the film industry regarding Race, Diversity and Black Film provided new questions and issues for the production of the visual artefact. As a result, those questions related to the design of the film's 'narrative' and my creation of Black Film Cognition. In doing so, I would refer to as experimental and exploratory interconnecting key themes from the literature, informal and formal interviews, websites and video material, with the intention of examining their various perspectives as a means to establish Black Film Cognition.

Conversations in Black as research

An analysis of the reflective material presented in this chapter highlights how the many decisions I made as a filmmaker during the production of *Conversations in Black* did not occur in a contextual void. When beginning the process, it was not sensibly open for me to make any film. While I was limited to the production resources I could organise for this research, I certainly was not working with the various budgets, crew and organisation I am normally associated when working on a project. I fashioned my production process and creative outcomes around several Hollywood and independent productions I had worked on when budgeting and resources were scarce. My film emerged from a history of practice-based knowledge and, I would argue, cannot be adequately understood independently of that history. Pierre Bourdieu would describe this as my 'feel for the game' (1990, pp. 62-3; 1998, pp. 79-81), or what Donald Schön would describe as 'tacit knowledge' (1983, pp. 49-56). In this regard, understanding and reflection of my practice as a filmmaker and the relationship of choices positioned my research in the field of Black Film.

I have viewed the objective of this research as providing an understanding of the practice of filmmaking that may not be possible in other contexts. The opportunity to use an autobiographical tone to provide self-reflection for this practice as it unfolds (Schön, 1983), has demonstrated tacit knowledge to address specific and particular circumstances of the production of *Conversations in Black*. I also believe these additional insights helped revise aspects of my practice when having to change direction during the production process.

In Chapter 2, utilising the literature review, I considered how the four tenets of Critical Race Theory informed my use of archival film and video footage when editing and restructuring the film's narrative. While this does not delineate from previous situations I had encountered when in production, the production environment during the making of *Conversations in Black* was a contested space of competing demands and priorities from an administrative, creative and practical level. Within this space, I relied on my previous experience as a production manager and experimental filmmaker to address what occurred to revise data I wanted to create and then analyse for this research project.

In the tradition of the 'bricoleur', I decided to engage a variety of research strategies in the form of a rather complex yet complementary method to cover the field more fully. For instance, I initially planned to conduct narrative interviews and surveys, observe onset activities while in production if possible, reflect upon my production experience, and refer to visual texts and relevant documentation while conducting my investigation. I specifically embraced a qualitative approach to my research, given that it allows a certain

openness to the inquiry³⁵ that crosses-over disciplines and combines a wide variety of research strategies of this type³⁶.

When beginning this research, I initially set out to produce a 'film' that combined the performative and narrative functions of filmmaking to explore issues relating to the production of Black Film. Self-reflective in nature, I desired to critically analyse debates about Black Film by engaging with repurposed and recycled video imagery, and utilising participants through semi-structured, qualitative-based interviews while applying filmed-based methodology to create a visual artefact. This visual artefact, along with the written dissertation, would demonstrate what these current practitioners perceive as challenges in Black filmmaking (e.g. identity, ideology, representation, stereotypes, and definitions of what constitutes a Black Film). The scope of the film would include the following:

1. Create a film narrative that questions and examines how industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production perceive the challenges of producing Contemporary Black Film.
2. Taken from initial pre-survey and interview questionnaire, examine different perspectives from interviews gathered from selected academics, filmmakers and producers of content regarding the production process and filmmaking as it relates to Black Film and Black Film aesthetics.
3. Find out their thoughts, concerns, lessons learned and stories that may have presented challenges or obstacles when filming or pursuing future projects.

³⁵ Charles C. Ragin, *Constructing Social Research*, Pine Forge, California, 1994, p. 83.

³⁶ Denzin & Lincoln, op. cit, p. 14.

4. Reflect on the discussions with key interviews in my practices by intermixing footage of the interviews and film re-enactments based on those interviews and from research.
5. Build on the scholarly debates regarding Black Film and lack of research regarding Race in media studies.

In conjunction with my career in film production, I designed this research as a means to develop my practice through doctoral research. The idea for this research was mainly inspired by the efforts of these individuals when developing, creating and producing films, media and television that featured all-Black casts, story narratives, and visual imagery. I initially approached 40 individuals I had identified as Producers of Black Film Content in the areas of producing, directing, cinematography, writing, casting and editing, for assistance with this project. Additionally, I received responses from four academics, two authors and three journalists who I approached about scholarly research, published books, and print-based articles they had produced on the topic of Black Film. I placed phone calls, sent emails, Facebook'd, Tweeted, and worked with several individuals throughout the early process of my research when creating and finalising the questionnaire and survey I wanted them to fill in and return to me. In total, 29 people responded to my request. I received 26 completed surveys, five email responses, three Facebook messages, and two conversations via Skype and telephone on which I have based my findings. Some of the more credentialed individuals advised that their availability for the project was limited and, in most instances, they would not be available for the filming of the interviews due to work commitments. The individuals listed here are included to highlight the breadth and depth of experience. Included are: F. Gary Gray, Richard Tanne, O'Shea Jackson (Ice Cube), James Lassiter, Debbie Allen, Steve McQueen, Ridley Scott, Tony Scott (he died during my first year of research),

Tim Story, Will Packer³⁷, Erika Alexander, Idris Elba, Ava DuVernay, Brad Phillips, Paris Barclay, Stacey Sher, Gina Prince-Blythewood, Nzinga Stewart, Jeffrey Wright and Stephanie Allain. Other prominent Producers of Black Film that I was not able to contact were: Taylor Hackford, Lee Daniels, Cynthia Mort, John Ridley, Don Cheadle, Nate Parker, Justin Simien, Issa Rae, Amma Assante, Kasi Lemmons, David Oyelowo, Jeff Byrd, Malcolm Lee, Spike Lee, John Singleton, Ralph Farquhar, Julie Dash and Antoine Fuqua.

Having worked with many of these individuals throughout my career, my understanding of the production process and how I experienced and learned filmmaking informed how I would design this research to be cautious of any assumptions or misunderstanding about Black Film production. Due to the lack of research from the perspective of these individuals, I wanted the design of the creative artefact to question how these respondents answered particular questions about Black Film rather than me as the researcher having a pre-determined idea of what I hoped to find. The area I had a particular interest in when it came to producers of Black Film, was how they positioned their production context and how that informed or influenced any issues of Race as it related to filmmaking practices, aesthetic concerns, story, narrative and diversity.

One aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how the model of creative PhDs can successfully be regarded as research. While I do define *Conversations in Black* as a 'film' in this study, it is also an experimental creative piece where the thematic and visual content are enhanced through the creative processes linking academic theory and filmmaking (Chapman, 2009, 2006).³⁸

Conversations in Black was designed to explore perspectives from producers

³⁷ Approved his voice being used about Black Film's future

³⁸ Although referencing documentary making, Chapman states 'a good documentary-maker will know how to exploit the pact between education and entertainment'.

of Black Film and present their responses to develop a narrative structure for the visual artefact. The majority of research on Black Film exists outside of media or film studies, as neither has focused on the production process; thus, I wanted to explore and utilise the process of counter-narrative and storytelling examples in Critical Race Theory. One of the motivations of using counter-narratives for this research was to feature how these participants' views on Black Film "redirect the dominant gaze" and "make it see from a new point of view what has been there all along" (Taylor, 2009, p. 8).

Because producers of Black Film have not written extensively about the issues and challenges throughout the filmmaking process, it was not possible nor desired to undertake a textual or major content analysis approach to this research. I have not been able to locate similar surveys with any producers of Black Film as I have referenced in my introduction. So few relevant interviews have been carried out on this topic, that I was unable to find much supporting material at all. Similarly, because of the difficulties associated with trying to access the relevant people, I encountered the following issues; the majority live abroad, scheduling and production delays, and unable to conduct face-to-face interviews. Nor was it possible to undertake focus group research due to availability and resources allocated for this project. As a result, my research options are therefore restricted to what I could reasonably undertake; surveys, some informal interviews, a reference to other relevant documents, and limited observation activities. I have drawn briefly in my introduction from the field of autoethnography, in that I have reflected on how my experience in filmmaking and production connects with the insights about the production process associated with filmmaking, revealed to me through my research. During the development process for this research, I had questions and concerns on how to conceive the filmmaking techniques required for the creative artefact.

The Perspectives of the Producers of Black Film

It is important at this time to remember what your task is during the filming process. Achieving that one perfect performance is not the goal. It is about recording a sufficient range so that you can recreate the performance in the editing room. Yes, of course, you are looking to capture those extraordinary moments that will occur, but this process is more about creating and collecting a range of material for post-production (Travis 2002, p. 257).

When referencing this quote, Travis is attempting to describe the conventional Hollywood approach to directing and cinematography with regards to narrative filmmaking. Sergi (2012) states that this technique includes filming multiple takes and various camera angles to create an actor's performance during the editorial process. While this may be true for a large number of filmmakers, many directors including myself have chosen not to use this method when filming. The desired outcome of this research is to practice filmmaking, to present my method of research, and to dramatize the findings through the creation of a visual-based artefact, whereas I draw from previous literature on Black Film and media/production studies to analyse the lack of research on 'Race.'

My filmmaking technique used the results from the initial surveys to help design a style of narrative using the voice of the respondents being filmed, combined with the reappropriation of found footage and a form of ethnographic filmmaking during the editing process as a means to create a visual narrative based on Critical Race Theory's examination of counter-narratives and storytelling.

Dagmar Brunow's article *Rethinking Remediation and Reworking the Archive: Transcultural Reappropriations of Documentary Images of Migration*, exemplified how I might be able to present the clips and interviews gathered for

this research as a means to rework dominant and majoritarian perspectives regarding Black Film.

Although it was not my initial intent to place the major emphasis of the creative project on repurposed film and recycled video footage; as a part of the filmmaking process, certain elements gave a level of dramatic effect or emotion to the scene and, as a result, the juxtaposition of each interview clip, photograph, film image and cinematic footage during the editing process (Adami, 2010). Therefore, the creation of *Conversations in Black* presented how Producers of Black Film discuss various questions as they relate to issues and challenges regarding the production of Black Film. Dagmar references the work of Stuart Hall's article *Reconstruction Work*, whereby Hall suggests the meaning of image changes when recontextualised, and thereby adds different layers of understanding through renewed circulation (Brunow, 2013, p. 3).

As I will discuss in the next section, my method for creating the practice was inspired by two documentary films; *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016) and *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* (2015). Very similar to the narrative structure utilised in both these documentaries, my creative process by design favoured secondary data (interviews, archive footage, print-based articles, photographs and film clips) to construct story narratives and structure, using the participants to observe and then present their unique perspectives when discussing Black Film.

Revising the Practice - through Bricolage from Experimental and Exploration to Film

Faced with the fundamental question: How do I create (text, visual images, story, narrative, structure and an argument) to adapt and meet these challenges? - I had to revise the methodology initially proposed in Chapter 3. Very similar to the authorial intentions that I wanted to examine when

interviewing the participants for this study, I returned to the concept of bricolage (loosely translated as the 'art of making do'³⁹) as a method to question the creative process and to place in context the nature of my practice-based research. Denzin and Lincoln's *Handbook of Qualitative Research* developed the notion of the qualitative researcher as bricoleur, "advancing this idea to include considerations of nuanced aspects of the work of qualitative researchers in which numerous approaches can be adopted, resulting in the following subsets of bricoleur: methodological; theoretical; interpretive; critical; political, and narrative (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; 2011)". Wibberley (2012, p. 7) states that bricolage is not about employing a strict protocol, template or framework which then outlines or even determines a specific outcome, but about engaging in a process out of which numerous outcomes can potentially emerge. In this fashion, bricolage involves a practice of appropriation, selection, and then reassemblage of materials and the 'tools' one has at close hand. For the filmed component of this research, referencing bricolage as method within my filming practice pertains to how I created and developed the secondary data during the editorial process to reflect the perspectives of the participants chosen for this study. According to Weinstein and Weinstein (1991, p.161), the solution and outcome is an 'emergent construct' that has developed in response to changing contexts, tools, materials and methods. As bricolage has become an integral aspect informing the creative process, the purpose for the remainder of this chapter is to detail the method for creating the data. In Chapter 5, I will detail the method to analyse the data along with the findings.

³⁹ Levi Strauss (1967) first introduced the concept of bricolage into contemporary thinking. Bricolage, defined as making-do with resources at hand when discussing art, science.

Process for Creating the Data

My intention in making *Conversations in Black* from the beginning stages of my research throughout the creative process was to challenge myself about the agency and identity of my role as the primary researcher/filmmaker as well as interpreting the perspectives from the producers of Black Film selected for this thesis. As my work included Critical Race Theory and the countering of dominant narratives, producing a body of work that includes a creative project engaging audio-visual media can be understood as a 'counter-narrative' when choosing to present this work in a non-traditional setting.

Conversations in Black is all about perspectives; its importance as a text lies within the construction and purpose of the central narrative to address the given voice of the participants and how they help inform my research on Blackness and Race in Media and Film Studies. *Conversations in Black* focuses on a "knowledge gap", the gap being Producers of Black Film and their social construction of Race (the emphasis here is on Blackness) and present knowledge claims. This work has remained focused on the area of storytelling and counter-narratives, as described in Critical Race Theory, to address the marginalisation of their voice in this area and to build on existing Black Film Theory. From the producers' perspective, it is possible to examine Black Film as a construction rather than a representation of Blackness or Race⁴⁰. The constructed nature of Black Film's cinematic identity is problematic.

The defining of Black Film has been contested and problematizes the construction of Blackness, as the history of Black Film arguably was framed to contest negative and biased depictions by non-Blacks (Bogle, 1977). Moreover, Benschoff (2009) argues that despite the fact Black filmmakers are addressing Blackness and Black issues in their films, mainstream ideas of Blackness

⁴⁰ This cycle begins as producers of Black Film draw from society's dominant ideology and "encode" their works with a "preferred" meaning (Hall, 1973).

continue to be constructed by Whites and marketed to Blacks. As a result, Benschoff suggests “the Black Films that find wide audiences are the films Hollywood itself allows to be produced and distributed” (Benschoff 2009, ch.4).

Selecting the Interview Footage

Conversations in Black is frequently observational, and strongly rooted in filmmaking using found footage, video and film archive in the style of a compilation film and is loosely modelled on a 3-act structure used in screenwriting to divide story narrative into three parts. These parts are to establish the main characters, the plot (character arc), and the resolution (climax).⁴¹ It was my goal to select interviews that I could position around several key narratives when addressing the use of Critical Race Theory and establish Black Film Cognition

These interviews provide the framework around three major segments. The producer's interviews formed the majority of the perspectives, either as the moments are beginning to unfold (as is the case in the first clip asking the participants how they identified themselves based on the positions they held), or retrospectively, as we see in the final sequence featuring Erica Conner discussing the future relevance of Black film. This narrative technique, whilst not new or unique, positions the voice of the participant interviewed to structure the film's narrative. Corner and Rosenthal (2005) theorised that some ‘events’ or situations could not speak for themselves. Therefore the emergence of documentaries utilising a compilation of interviews is a strategic response to recognising that the singular voice cannot speak with ultimate authority

⁴¹ Trottier, David: "The Screenwriter's Bible", pp. 5–7. Silman James, 1998.

(Nichols, 2005). The footage using interviews sought to represent the themes I established when referencing the initial review of literature in Chapter 2, and the surveys and questionnaire completed in Chapter 3.⁴²

When creating *Conversations in Black*, the authorial intention was to have the interviews selected represent the voice of the participants and not necessarily lose itself within the voice (or message) of the film. In this instance, the perspective voice of the participants does not deteriorate the controlling voice and agency or identity of this filmmaking technique. According to Rosenthal and Corner (2005, p. 24), the narrative effect on a viewer is distinctly different; thus, I relied on the words and thoughts conveyed during the interviews to communicate ideas that I wanted to convey and decided to reduce the number of voiceovers or narration. I believed that if I used voiceover to communicate some of the dramatic or observational elements, the film would take on an authorial and didactic feel that I was hoping to avoid. Although referencing documentary and heritage, Roth quoted in Leyda (1964, p. 9); 'Documentary can and does draw on the past in its use of existing heritages, but it only does so to give point to a modern argument.'⁴³ When referencing Critical Race Theory or the various titles for Black Film Cognition in the film, I experimented with text and various clips to introduce the footage as a means to convey an idea not just report or document it (Leyda, 1964, p. 9).⁴⁴

⁴² I used the surveys to help booster the filmed interviews to see how I could visually address certain scenes so narratives using the found footage materials.

⁴³ De Jong, W., 2012. From wallpaper to interactivity: use of archive footage in documentary filmmaking. *Journalism and mass communication*, 2(3), pp.464-477.

⁴⁴ The idea here was to use the clips as means to example how various images related to and supplement my use of Critical Race Theory, but to avoid the use of voiceover narration.

Structuring the Narrative

Following in the tradition of the 'talking head' documentary, the footage I gathered was sought to represent the themes relating to Critical Race Theory and for the purpose of building Black Film Cognition. The criteria for the footage and supporting materials were: to address Black Film definitions; perspectives on story and narratives as it related to Black Film; and the agency, identity and diversity these practitioners may have experience of, or give voice to during production. In several instances, film clips, news articles, photographic stills and graphics were used to address and illustrate dramatic moments or key observations. Various segments or clips were played in their entirety with no edit to create the dramatic tensions and to develop the story narrative.

Before editing, I began researching various secondary data sources from libraries and other literature sources; journals, textbooks, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, annual reports, electronic articles and media. During this phase of production, it was difficult to know exactly which archive interview or video image would be useful to include in my story. I continued to search, reading and recording the information about each item including story information, the name of 'talents' and broadcast date, as I was looking for interviews and materials as early as 2009 to present.⁴⁵ It should be noted that *Conversations in Black* is not for theatrical release, and therefore most of the materials have been created for the sole purpose of making a visual presentation of this research. Throughout the video and in the credits, I acknowledge the origin of clips and follow the university protocol for utilising copyrighted materials and information.

⁴⁵ As this research is about contemporary Black Film, I wanted to limit the majority of the films and material to current information with a few exceptions based on mood, tone, or participant.

Although the editing process involved a lot of compromises, I had a clear idea of the narrative and the performative style I wanted to apply to achieve that goal. I assembled my visual material first, and categorised the data into lists of interviews, observational reflective narrative and covering footage. The narrative would be built around personal experiences of the interviewees. I looked for videos that had a mix of personal reflection, oral history and more targeted interviews. These interviews, I felt, would be able to manipulate⁴⁶ with sounds, film clips, graphics and music that would reinforce what the interviewees were saying, thereby enhancing their stories (for example, Jeffrey Wright defining Black Film, Amma Asante or Ava DuVernay talking story and narrative, Charles Woods on Selma and LBJ).

One major drawback I question regarding the narrative structure is the length of some the clips, the positioning of myself within the narrative, and use of my voice and text to explain Critical Race Theory and Black Film Cognition. One major concern based on feedback from my editor, my supervisor and people I showed an initial edit, was to let the participants' responses demonstrate agency and how this could visually depict Critical Race Theory. One suggestion was to consider how each interviewee was positioned, and their voice represented storytelling as it pertains to Critical Race Theory with content. These aspects of one's identity matter, and are "positioned" relative to the dominant culture which is privileged when we talk about learners, research, and teaching (Tisdell, 2001). In hindsight, I feel the section, filled with interesting content, draws away from rather than adds to the narrative. For example, when Shacola Thompson talked about pitching projects, or Erica Conner talks about the impact of being a female producer, each narrative story speaks to the impact of positionality as being black females.

⁴⁶ My reference to manipulate refers to how I used various clips to give these particular interviews agency and added to their content.

Editing Conversations in Black

My movie is born first in my head, dies on paper; is resuscitated by the living persons and real objects I use, which are killed on film but, placed in a certain order and projected onto a screen, come to life again like a flower in water (Bresson 1977, p. 7).

Editing the Data Analysis

Goodman (2004) presents the problem I experienced, occupying the same position as the researcher and the filmmaker. He questions how one might visualise a large set of data and then seek out meaningful relationships. In this respect, the process for editing compares to the data analysis process. First, one has to manage the lengthy process connecting different images, scenes and sequences within the film. In doing so, the process can be long and tedious when trying to connect different images, scenes and sequences within the film. Moreover, to create a project that is performative and narrative, it is a creative process of interpretation to create a product whose purpose is to capture and hold audience attention.

This procedure when making the final film, and the troubles in structuring the film's narrative focus, was difficult. Corner (2004) describes the decision to select which film clips and secondary elements would remain, versus the material that would be cut out as a crucial factor when working across different modes of storytelling (participatory, performance, observation, interviews, graphics and narration). When choosing to create a narrative within the film, I was trying to "observe events occurring before the camera within a relatively stable system of place-time continuity, usually in a greatly abridged and edited chronological sequence (p. 338)." This condensed representation pointed me again to my key research question: addressing the issues and challenges from the perspective of Producers of Black Film against

the ethical considerations and dilemmas behind these creative and practical decisions. How could I be true to the views of these individuals and maintain a degree of agency using their voice in a performative/narrative film? I chose to combine different elements to construct mood, and demonstrate how various Producers responded to questions, situations or scenarios regarding their identity, how they defined Black Film, and the narratives and stories they constructed. For example, I began by asking each participant how they identified themselves. I left the scene unedited to demonstrate how each gave voice and addressed the issues of agency and their identity. When using the clip with the costume designer Tomika Smalls answering the question about how she identified as a woman who is black and white, but, when asked about her decision when attempting to express her professional opinion, she provided a counter-narrative distinguishing identity and how that informs her idea of blackness. The combination of these elements from the start, although constructed, helped create the narrative regarding depictions of Blackness from a producer of Black Film content giving her a broader context.

Films evoke natural sounds, music, the spoken word, text animation, and a variety of visual images. These multiple cues are not important in their own right, but they are different ways to create meaning. Most research deals with abstract ideas that must be given meaning. Words are a very limited way of creating that meaning. In some cases, other media may be more effective, or a combination of media may elicit meaning more powerfully
(Goodman, 2004, p. 334).

Combining Interview with Performative Narration

Once the editor and I began to add sequences and frames on the timeline, I always had the idea of using particular edits to subconsciously

trigger an understanding or convey a certain theme at the beginning and end of the film. For the narrative, I chose clips where I could try to enhance the narrative visually with graphics or dissolves. The intent was to have these clips perform a level of self-reflexivity demonstrating a level of performance agency and propelling the film's narrative structure. In his 2005 article *The Voice of Documentary*, Bill Nichols argues that additions like these create something that is impossible in films that rely completely on the interview, which give us no sense of a character's present but only use his or her words as testimony about the past.

Despite the urging of my editor, my supervisor, and former advisor, I remained convinced that I was too involved in the planning of this study and my authorial intent, my agency, would be reduced in further attempts to add voiceover narration. I was adamant about this until my third viewing of the section where Black Film Cognition begins. The question for my editor and I, was about how to include previous footage where I had film of myself preparing for several interviews about my project, and an attempt to generate behind-the-scenes-type footage. When referring to the inclination of individuals to act in certain ways or make certain decisions based on social factors such as class, family, and education, Bourdieu uses the term 'disposition'. He states:

Although positions help to shape dispositions, the latter, in so far as they are the product of independent conditions, have an existence and efficacy of their own and can help to shape positions (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 61).

In this regard, I am using the term disposition to refer to the decisions I made and how my ability as a filmmaker may influence my decisions. Most importantly, when making a choice to include myself in the footage, I am

using the term disposition to consider the type of film I am 'making' along with my sensibilities as a filmmaker.

When my editor and I re-examined the data we had been compiling, it became very interesting how I began to make decisions about the edit (which clips to use, positioning them on the timeline, the duration of the clip, sound elements, and the degree to which I wanted the clip to convey a point or message). At this point in the process, our conversation started to re-entertain how I could create a voiceover or script to fill some gaps where she kept feeling my voice needed to be added. At this point, we were focusing on the section regarding Black Film Cognition, Critical Race Theory and the introduction.

At this point, my entire issue with the voiceover narration and inclusion of myself in the film had to do with my role in creating the content for film, the quality and the timeframe we would need to film, script and edit this supporting material. Jade assured me we could do all this in a day or two, and proceeded to take steps to reserve all the equipment necessary for the mini-shoot.

Personal Reflexivity

One of my strongest ethical dilemmas lay in deciding how I should represent myself in the text. Many ideas occurred to me during the development of the film, but each new one seemed clumsier than the last. For example, I scripted a number of voiceover commentaries that explained my decision to do research on Producers of Black Film and why I was so interested in Black Film Production. I considered how to contextualise these, by constructing montages of images that seemed to fall short of the material I was capturing with the participants due to their availability and the location constraints. Although I did film several voiceovers and one-man interviews,

ultimately, I understood that the difficulty lay in the fact that I was attempting to create an 'external reflexivity' (MacDougall, 1999, pp. 88-89) that seemed to detract from the scene or richness of the commentary from the individual. Finally, when reviewing the edits on the timeline, I tried to develop several reflexive moments captured spontaneously in the course of filming.

During these moments, I wanted to acknowledge my presence in the narrative, but also try to convey the relationship between the film's narrative, the various perspectives, and the relationship linking Black Film Cognition and Critical Race Theory played in creating the film's visual content. During the production, I wanted to film a behind-the-scenes-type scenario that engaged myself with the process; this included the footage I used to introduce the project, establishing the role of Critical Race Theory and then detailing the relevance of Black Film Cognition to establish the content in each category. Out of context, I tried to experiment with these reflexive moments so that they could potentially be viewed as simple comments. However, when editing into the performance of each of these sequences, I wanted to explore the 'constructed' nature of the film and my authorial intention, using the remediation of these images to document the perspectives of these participants and my own.

Upon further review and feedback from my supervisor, the ethical reason for placing myself in the text was to be honest about my authorship of the film, but without overemphasizing the use of recycled film footage to create the structure of the film. In a review of the scenes, I question the degree I achieved this as a means to establish my role as 'mediator,' facilitating the subjective nature of the content visibly or through the editing process. Making myself a more obvious presence within the story would have risked my competing with them for the viewers' attention.

Conclusion

Although I have tried to deconstruct the process when developing and producing *Conversations in Black*, by applying the theory extracted in Chapter 2 mixed with self-reflection, I have attempted to present stages of the production process for the creative component explicit. In this chapter, I have briefly outlined these steps and detailed the changes I made in production due to loss of budget and the financial constraints impacting how I revised my methodology and method in order to produce a creative-based artefact. In the next chapter, I will address how I analysed the data and briefly explore what I perceived to be findings at this stage.

Chapter 5: Findings in *Conversations in Black*

Overview

After completing and reviewing the final edit for *Conversations in Black*, I decided to analyse my data and approach it with two critical outlooks: Content Analysis, which involves looking directly at the data I coded and drawing conclusions from it; and Critical Race Theory, which investigates the film on a more in-depth level and attempts to frame the counter-narratives expressed by the film's participants to structure and analyse how they view and discuss Black Film.

Existing work in the field of Black Film encompassing theory and practice, placed major emphasis on evaluating Black Film in relation to 'social relevance' by establishing how Black Film can be "political", "controversial", and viewed as "aspirational" (Grant, 2004; Lott, 1999; Mask, 2012; Reid, 2005; Watkins, 1998). This thesis endeavoured to explore this pre-existing field and, at the same time, present how these individuals deconstruct the language of Black Film through the utilisation of counter-narratives as defined by Critical Race Theory.

By placing emphasis on Producers of Black Film, this work has presented how these practitioners addressed their process for making Black Film along with giving voice to discourses defining Black Film. The underlying hypothesis of this study is that there have been changes in the making of Black Film. The stories are diverse, using narratives that are not only stereotypical but also those that offer a counter-narrative. There is still a critique of the stories/narratives; however, this discourse allows for a broad acknowledgement that the concept of filming 'Blackness' is changing. Whilst previous work on Black Film has been made comparing 'Black Film' to 'mainstream film', primarily in Black Film studies, evaluation of Black Film

Cognition from the perspectives of the film practitioners in my study, has definitively demonstrated that multiple and diverse perspectives from those engaged in film practice can (and did) occur when addressing Black Film. By singling out these counter-narratives and visually depicting Black Film Cognition, my aim was to question the production of Black Film from the broader and more common 'What is Black Film?' discussion.

The findings and data analysis present how Black Film Cognition is demonstrated through a series of interviews and industry-wide discussions held within the research period and relating to my experimentation with compilation style of filmmaking.⁴⁷ This is, in essence, my application of Critical Race Theory using these perspectives as data to be analysed for my study, as previously described. The content, once finalised, will give way to analysing the perspectives from one another and allow me to comment on their perspectives and demonstrate Critical Race Theory's call to challenge the 'dominant ideologies and myths about Black Film', by presenting how these Producers of Black Film develop points of view, and how these views contrast by deviating from the 'grand narrative' about Black Film to allow for other, less commonly-told narratives to be heard. The data I have obtained from the demographic group I used is ideal for analysis that focuses on how these views relate to Black Film Cognition.

I was able to use the outcome of this thematic analysis to draw some limited conclusions about the relationship between the written thesis for this research and the creative artefact *Conversations in Black* to apply Critical Race Theory to the lack of study of Race in Media and Film Studies. I will divide this chapter into three primary sections, each of which will report my findings

⁴⁷ As I discussed in Chapter 4, this film style is created by juxtaposing found footage from multiple sources. The term has also been applied to the physical collaging of materials onto film stock (in this case, of digital filmmaking).

and analyse them. As this thesis is interested in how one can bring Critical Race Theory to the study of Black Films within Media and Film Studies, understanding how I selected the content is of paramount interest.

Section 1: A Review of the Process

Data Analysis

I entered the study knowing that I had two main data analysis goals. First, I wanted to gain a literal understanding of my participants' perspectives and practices associated with Black Film production and then determine what themes emerged from that data. Second, I wanted to create the accompanying creative artefact *Conversations in Black* to explore the counter-narratives associated with my participants' perspectives and practices by considering the data through the lenses of Critical Race Theory and my call for Black Film Cognition.

To gain a literal understanding of my participants' perspectives and practices, I reviewed my data using an interpretive process (Denzin, 2006). Each time I collected data, I read through what was gathered and compared the new data with data that I already had discovered throughout the literature on Black Film. These methods are consistent with a constant comparative approach (Glaser, 1965), which requires data to be collected and analysed throughout the study rather than analysing it only at the end. A constant comparative approach enables comparisons and interpretations of data which are not restricted to predefined categories and is used during both data collection and data analysis since it involves examining data while it is collected rather than waiting to examine it only after it is all gathered. This process can be described as both recursive and inductive, since relationships arise through sequential examinations of the data. It also allows for reinterpretations, as the meanings behind participants' perspectives and

practices become more prominent. These procedures allow comparisons to be made across time and for all dimensions of the data. For example, I was able to analyse data from a single participant's first and/or second interview, examine data across different participants' interviews, and examine data across data collection methods (e.g. interview data and observational data).

My initial categorising of data from the literature was literal and inductive, following the Lett (1990) reference of emic and etic coding. For example, my initial coding included categories such as aesthetics, authenticity, perspective on stereotypical imagery, and the importance of the filmmaker's identity. I then re-examined my data and used my theoretical framework (Critical Race Theory) to generate additional codes that were more deductive based on the initial responses I received from the questionnaire, survey and interviews. This follows Lett's examples of etic coding. Most importantly, I did not start with predefined categories or themes to which I fitted the data; the perspectives and practices of my respondents determined the proposed data themes, categories and patterns which were found during the interview data and participants' responses.

I used Critical Race Theory to design my interpretations of themes once they materialised from the data. The category that I associated with Critical Race Theory pertained to counter-narratives, diversity and the racialised issues pertaining to the cultural production of 'Blackness'. Whilst there were some comparable themes, I began to classify similar categories under groups in order to better situate my respondents' perspective. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) refer to these groupings as 'families', based on their relationship and similarity. Based on these categories, I created a visual word map to represent the themes and content. Figure 3 - The word map taken from primary data sources exemplifies the themes and categories that represent that coding of data.



Figure 3 - The word map taken from primary data sources

Demographic Data

The demographic of participants who answered some or part of the survey and questionnaire included both male and female participants. The researcher interviewed a total of 15 males and 14 females, whose ages ranged from 25 to 66-years old. The participants were from a mixed group of ethnicities, race, and sexual orientation. The participants mostly identified as African American (13), of Hispanic/Latin descent (5), White (4), Asian (4), and Native American (3). The number of years as a Producer of Black Film, as defined by this study, ranged from one to 45 years. Six of the participants resided on the East Coast, and 17 of the participants resided on the West Coast. Three of the participants resided in American Southwest and three in the United Kingdom. All the participants identified as one or more of the following filmmaking positions: director, producer, actor, cinematographer, writer and editor. Each of the filmmakers has completed, released, credited or critiqued a minimum of one film project.

The Data Collection Procedures

As previously stated, the data collected was: 29 completed surveys; five email responses; three Facebook messages; and two conversations via Skype and telephone on which several aspects of the secondary data used for the content and themes was depicted in *Conversations in Black*. It should be noted that the filmed interviews combined with the information gained from these responses was used to help build the story and narrative. When searching for supporting materials for the filmed component of this thesis (for example, news articles, journals, graphic and visual images, film clips, and filmed interviews or engagements), these responses provided the basis for the narrative. The category that emerged in this study reflected perspectives labelled under the Black Film Cognition theme:

- Defining Black Film
- Story and Film Narrative
- Diversity
- Agency
- Identity (how these participants view themselves within the category of Producer of Black Film as outlined by this study)

To address the issues of 'Race' reflected in the responses, the tenets of Critical Race Theory as outlined in Chapter 1 will be used to address the following in Section 3:

- Counter-narratives
- Narratives and Storytelling

Section 2: Perspectives as Data

In this section, the results of the interview study exploring the perspectives of the Producers of Black Film are described in order to present the themes. A section entitled Key Themes begins the findings and analysis of

the participants' responses, to build upon and understand the primary themes discussed by Producers of Black Film regarding depictions and images of Blackness in their films. The results from the data analysis of these interviews and responses produced a substantive theory about their process when making Black Film, with interactions, actions and practices within the area of Black Film Cognition previously identified.

An Overview of the Key Themes

The following key themes frame the perspectives and dialogue presented in *Conversations in Black*. I refer to these themes as Black Film Cognition, and therefore will enhance my analysis to provide a better understanding of how I chose to represent and reflect Black Film Cognition visually, based on the responses I received from the questionnaire and surveys I created for the research. I consider these to be very notable and distinguished perspectives to briefly present here, as they present visual and audio information that I juxtapose and reconceptualise in the filmed artefact. The analysis of these key themes will be discussed in more detail.

Defining Black Film

The defining of Black Film academically, and from the perspective of the Producers who responded to the survey, varied on aesthetic merits and philosophy of how Black Film has been classified within the industry. Scenes from *Conversations in Black* present Van Thomas, Cinematographer, stated that for it to be a 'Black Film', it should have producers who have lived the experiences to understand the storyline; "Unless you lived it, hard to understand." Tamika Smalls', Costume Designer, response is similar to Van Thomas, in that she believes you need to understand what it means to be black in order for the aesthetics to be honestly reflective of the black experience. Shacola Thompson, Producer/Actress, believes that when you are trying to

“green light” your project, it is Hollywood that determines whether or not it is a Black Film. Erica Conner, Producer/Writer believes Black Film is about Blackness. Is it believable? It is about the environment of where you come from. It should invoke feelings because it culturally and aesthetically reflects the black environment. John Marshall, Actor, discussed the influence that Hollywood has on whether or not a film is black. His definition of a Black Film is one that is produced, directed, written by, and starring a black cast. Erika Alexander believes that because you lived the American experience, it is no longer a Black Film but an American film that is told through the filters of your experiences.

The understanding of how these producers choose to define Black Film for my analysis has two interdependent parts: 1) the ultimate goal when defining Black Film for this research is so that critics, theorists, audiences and, most importantly, filmmakers can better discern how the agency of Blackness is being represented as means of racial inclusion and diversity when Black actors are being represented in certain film narratives, as opposed to 2) when certain filmmakers are using Blackness to be critical of the status quo and to encourage viewers to see Black Film as universal stories and narratives that encourage racial empathy, tolerance and diversity.

What Story/Narrative Defines your Filmmaking Process

Morshelle Thompson, spoken-word artist believes that the filmmaking process is changing. What has changed is not what you say it is how you say. It is about counter-narratives that are the stories being told.

Conversations on Diversity in the Industry

In the scene referencing diversity, Tamika Smalls discussed her experience of reminding her white producers that she was hired because she was a black costume designer, and as such, her view on the aesthetics of the

clothing for a scene with black women was authentic and representative of the culture. This is why a production staff represented of a diverse group is invaluable in the decision-making process.

Agency and Identity

John Marshall, Actor, discussed the influence that Hollywood has on whether or not a film is black. When the film is marketable/successful it is no longer a Black Film. In his view, Hollywood has determined black actors (Kevin Hart, Samuel L. Jackson, Denzel Washington, Will Smith) who are making the films are no longer starring in black films.

The understanding of how these producers choose to define Black Film for my analysis has two interdependent parts: 1) the ultimate goal when defining Black Film for this research is so that critics, theorists, audiences and most importantly filmmakers can better discern how the agency of Blackness is being represented as means of racial inclusion and diversity when Black actors are being represented in certain film narratives, as opposed to, 2) when certain filmmakers are using Blackness to be critical of the status quo and to encourage viewers to see Black Film as universal stories and narratives that encourage racial empathy, tolerance and diversity.

Questions about Position

During the survey period, many of the responses regarding craft, aesthetic style or motivation answered specific questions about who they are, what they did, how they perceived the working relations based on their career, position and socioeconomic status. However, when performing the interviews, many did not answer or elaborate further. In a recent interview for Vulture, the Black American director Ava DuVernay said that as she is rarely asked about filmmaking, she “could count on one hand the conversations that I’ve had about craft”.

Analysing the Interviews and presenting Black Film Cognition

For the purpose of this study, each of the participants and their responses have been assigned a number to anonymize their identity. Their responses have been extracted from each of their questionnaires and/or interviews and referred to the participant by their identifying number when referencing quotations. Some of the interview questions overlap with regard to their relationship to the key themes associated with Black Film Cognition.

The findings within each theme of Black Film Cognition will be organised using illustrative quotes from each interview. There is some overlap between and amongst themes as evidenced by the participants' interpretation of Black Film, 'Blackness' and Black Film production. This provides an insight into understanding the essence of each participant's response, navigating their filmmaking practice as it pertains to working with Black mediated images. Using the questionnaire, survey and during the interview process, participants were encouraged to express and share their practical outlook and their understanding of Black Film.

Therefore, the interview questions will appear in sequence with multiple responses from the respondents. This method was used in an effort to provide answers to the actual research questions posed in the study. The interview questions are reported under the research question but will be associated with the key theme they relate to. For example, interview question 1, 5, 6, 8, 11, 14, 16, 17 apply to the key theme Defining Black Film, whereas questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 16, 17 pertain to the key theme Story and Narrative.

In the section below, in response to the research question, the researcher only lists the answer once, under the first reported interview question that it relates to. The researcher also reiterated which interview question falls under which key theme within the introduction to the interview

responses as well. Each of the major categories that were identified is italicized underneath each of the interview questions. An illustration of these themes found during open coding can be found in **Error! Reference source not found..** The quotes are used to support and illustrate the themes that emerged during the interviews. After the completion of reporting these responses, the next section will address the dramatizing of themes and data that I refer to as Black Film Cognition in order to create the film *Conversations in Black* and the counter-narrative these perspectives demonstrate when discussing Black Film.

Black Film Cognition	Interview Questions
Defining Black Film	Question 1, 5, 6, 8, 11, 14, 16, 17
Story and Narrative	Question 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 16, 17
Identity	Question 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15
Race/Diversity	Question 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15
Agency	Question 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17

Figure 4 - Research to interview question

Section 3: Dramatising Black Film Cognition and Counter-Narratives

This section of my findings is dedicated to the interpretive analysis of the questionnaire, survey and interview responses. I will use the research question and relate Black Film Cognition to the participants' counter-narratives in a summative manner. The reason for this, is that the perspectives from filmed interviews, survey responses, and the final edit of *Conversations in Black* intertwined with each other; therefore, attempting to address the data from each will inevitably overlap with responses from the other questions as seen in Section 2 and in Appendix G.

The film entitled *Conversations in Black* is a creative endeavour, and a different, complementary platform for analysis that will blend the nature of the audio/visual function of film to juxtapose the various perspectives captured by the participants discussed in the written portion of my thesis, and to explain some aspects of my filmmaking process that is not possible in a written thesis.

Building upon ideas from his influential work *Transcultural Cinema*, leading ethnographic filmmaker and scholar David MacDougall argues that visual images create ‘a way of knowing that is different from thinking’ (Colusso, 2017). In *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*, MacDougall stated that a majority of a filmmaker’s effort goes into ‘putting the viewer into a particular relationship to a subject and creating a progression of images and scenes to understand it (MacDougall, 2006, p. 7). The distinction that Colusso suggests MacDougall is conveying, implies that films are ‘a form of looking’ that is ‘trying to say something’ that happens before anything can be described, before ideas can be expressed and a mode of “attentiveness-to-the-other” (Colusso, 2017, p. 141).

The purpose for my written thesis and my filmed thesis was to supplement and reinforce the other, with neither being intended as the ‘primary’ or sole investigation. Following the same logic: that dictates and advocates for the positioning of voices of my participants in my written and filmed analyses, and ultimately explores counter-narratives that interconnect ideas but in different media that provide their own distinct means for visual expression; the study exposed several issues related to the participants’ perceptions of Black Film and the various issues that promoted the idea of Black Film Cognition. The method for analysing my data combined written and filmed approaches resulting in what I consider to be the overall perspective enhanced and informed by the participants in this study.

As discussed in my literature review, there is neglect of the majority of scholars who research Black cultural production and position the production context from producers of Black Film and the loss of their voice in various debates about Black film. Critical Race Theory (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002) provides a framework for this study. The study challenges the dominant/majoritarian stories with *counter-narratives*, which are used to explain the experiences from these producers. The study exposed several issues related to the participants' perceptions of black film and identity that resonated in the film via their voice and authority.

This is also true within my written analysis versus the film, as there is an 'inevitable' difference between what I can communicate with words versus images and sound as I address my research question. Furthermore, the analysis via written versus audio-visual is likely to develop with this dual approach; the written affording detailed description but the audio/visual delivering a juxtaposition of the film images, the relation of the characters and their identity, and voice.

This was a practice-based project that utilised film techniques and video imagery to connect the subject with desired intent to present Critical Race Theory and Black Film Cognition via the person's speech and how their voice and perspectives dictated how they were received.

The written analysis of a filmed artefact therefore also introduces the same mode of concerns though the process of creating or assembling during the edit, which affords me to answer a different and complementary set of questions about voice, the position of the narrative and what each response meant. By this, I mean the creative process of editing together the material into a new creative artefact will unquestionably evoke different reactions in me as a filmmaker and researcher and will also give me the opportunity to experiment

with and watch isolated clips of the interviews and footage, cut together and re-arranged. As Desmond Bell notes:

*When evaluation is auto-critical in form, with the author of the work providing an analytical dissection of what they have produced, then some additional element of insight stemming from their intimate knowledge of the creative processes involved in a particular project might be brought to the analysis; a sort of experiential grounding for reflection.*⁴⁸

As such, the act of producing the filmed thesis based on the surveys and interview enabled a practical and experiential examination of how the perspectives and the narrative or its detail may be altered by the process. As the producer of *Conversations in Black*, I have an 'intimate' insight into the process involved in taking this position, my experiences, and my relation to the top.

To examine the possibilities of combining aspects of each of the interviews and filmed footage purely in a written thesis, would require a degree of cognition (see Bordwell reference in Chapter 1, p. 51) and limit the creative experimentation that has the potential to augment analysis. In other words, the act of 'doing the film' immerses me in both the shot footage, affording me 'experiential' knowledge of the other four films, as well as the potential in its reassemblage, including of course the addition of music, sound, titles, and/or voiceover. Working with the footage, reviewing it, and playing it over and over and in different sequences, gives me the opportunity to experience it differently and more intimately (this calls back to mind the idea of repetition in von Trier' and Hartley's work). David Bohm expresses a

⁴⁸ Desmond Bell, 'Creative Film and Media Practice as Research – in Pursuit of the Obscure Object of Knowledge', *Journal of Media Practice*, 7 (2006), pp.85-100 (p.86).

similar idea on the value of varying one's investigative methods in *On Creativity* when he writes that:

*... Penetrating insight may lead to important discoveries, and to new inventions of considerable practical importance. Yet, it is not creation. For in creation, one perceives a new fundamental set of similar differences that constitutes a genuinely new order (and not merely a relationship between two or more orders that are already known). This new order leads hierarchically to a wide range of new kinds of structure. Generally speaking, an isolated penetrating insight connecting up one field with another falls short of doing all this.*⁴⁹

Within the considerations of my study, the combination of written and creative practice I have chosen is intended to produce an exploration and examination of the creative works. Moreover, as my research is grounded in the belief of giving voice to the perspectives in one medium to present their counter-narrative, it is 'good practice' to let the investigation span both these media.

The filmed component is an aural and visual narrative of the perspectives that share unique similarities and differences between their narratives, occupation, and relation to each other. The result is an experimental and exploratory 'mixing together' of components from each of the interviews, intended to create a new idea of what these perspectives are and mean as a whole/group. The process of making this film illuminates the audio-visual specific nature of each interpretation of the question asked and answered. The experimental and exploratory style of filmmaking was not only in the process of filming for me, but also was present during the film editing

⁴⁹ David Bohm, *On Creativity* (Psychology Press, 1998), p.19.

process. The revelations born from making the film informed my written thesis to some degree (just as the written information informed the film, via the literature reviewed and the survey responses returned), but I would add, that in an interview with Michael T. Martin for the *Black Camera Journal*, Ava DuVernay stated, “Filmmakers should build ‘New Ways of Doing Things’ that combat representation and abstract notions of one-dimensionality.”⁵⁰ I believe, in creating *Conversations in Black* and undergoing this research for myself, was a step in that direction.



Figure 5 - Erika Conner - Producer/Writer



Figure 6 - Von Thomas - Cinematographer/Camera operator

⁵⁰ Martin, Michael T. “Conversations with Ava DuVernay — ‘A Call to Action’: Organizing Principles of an Activist Cinematic Practice.” *Black Camera*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2014, pp. 57–91. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/blackcamera.6.1.57.(accessed October, 2017)



Figure 7 - Shacola Thompson - Producer/Actress



Figure 8 - Erika Alexander - Actress/Writer



Figure 9 - Morshelle Thompson - Artist/Writer



Figure 10 - John Marshall - Actor



Figure 11 - Tomika Smalls - Production Designer/Costume Wardrobe Stylist

This process took inspiration from Saldana's notion of ethnography being transformed into experiments, with artistic modes of research representation referred to as an ethnodrama (Bagley and Cancienne, 2002; Barone, 1997; Denzin, 1997; Diamond and Mullen, 1999, 2000; Eisner, 1997; Ellis and Bochner, 1996; S. Finley and Knowles, 1995; Jipson and Paley, 1997; Spry, 2001).⁵¹ The participants in this study note that their perceptions are, in

⁵¹ The script consists of analysed and dramatized significant selections from interview transcripts, field notes, journal entries, or other written artefacts. Characters in an ethnodrama are generally the research participants portrayed by actors, but the actual researchers and participants themselves may be cast members

part, difficult conversations and personal narratives (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). When referencing Critical Race Theory, this form of storytelling provides space or voice for the participants to "speak with experiential knowledge" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 43) about their issues, challenges and successes as Producers of Black Film.

By placing emphasis on Producers of Black Film, this work has presented how these practitioners have addressed their process for making Black Film along with giving voice to discourses defining Black Film. The underlying hypothesis of this study is that there have been changes in the making of Black Films. The stories are diverse, utilising narratives that are not only stereotypical but those that offer a counter-narrative. There is still a critique of the stories/narratives; however, this discourse allows for a broad acknowledgement that the concept of filming 'Blackness' is changing. While previous work on Black Film has been made comparing 'Black Film' to 'mainstream film', primarily in Black Film Studies, evaluation of Black Film Cognition from the perspectives of these film practitioners in my study, has definitively demonstrated that multiple and diverse perspectives from those engaged in film practice can (and did) occur when addressing Black Film. By singling out these counter-narratives and visually depicting Black Film Cognition, my aim was to question the production of Black Film from the broader and more common 'What is Black Film?' discussion.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Overview

In this study on Black Film, I have endeavoured to explore how Producers of Black Film content perceive the challenges and issues related to creating, developing and producing Black Film. This research examines the ways in which film practitioners discuss the filmmaking practices they associate with when making Black Films. The study emphasises how Black Films are created, produced and developed, and the manner in which these constructions/deconstructions aesthetically occur in Blackness. The culmination of this project is a creative, practice-based PhD, consisting of 50% practice component and 50% written exegesis examining how industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production perceive the challenges of producing Contemporary Black Film.

The main body of this thesis is in two sections. Part 1 addresses the Research Question using Critical Race Theory to build a counter-narrative about Black Film and to establish the concept of Black Film Cognition. Part II addresses the production of the film *Conversations in Black*, and the findings and reflection generated by the research process, to explore and present how the practitioners responded to questions about Race, Black Film and Black Film production. This thesis explored the field, and at the same time reflected on certain theoretical production and filmmaking concepts in deliberately accessible language.

By placing emphasis on Producers of Black Film, this work has presented how these practitioners have addressed their process for making Black Film along with giving voice to discourses defining contemporary Black Film. The underlying hypothesis of this study is that there have been changes in the making of Black Films. These changes can be viewed by the recent box

office success of films featuring an all-Black cast, produced, directed and written by Black/African Americans. The stories are diverse, utilising narratives that are not only stereotypical but those that offer a counter-narrative to the contemporary production of Black Film. There is still a critique of the stories/narratives; however, this discourse allows for a broad acknowledgment that the concept of Black Film and filming 'Blackness' are changing.

While previous work on Black Film has been made comparing 'Black Film' to 'mainstream film', primarily in Black Film Studies, evaluation of filmmaking practices from Producers of Black Film in my study, has definitively demonstrated that multiple and diverse perspectives from those engaged in film practice can (and did) occur when addressing Black Film. By singling out these counter-narratives and visually depicting Black Film Cognition, my aim was to question the production and filmmaking practices within the making of Black Film from the broader and more common 'What is Black Film?' discussion.

As presented in Stuart Hall's essay, *"What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?"* the questions about Black Film continue to be the subject of much debate among Producers of Black Film, although, as this thesis has attempted to adapt that question to address contemporary Black Film, this study is only a start to research questions that underpin an investigation of Producers of Black Film. While existing scholarship on Black Film has informed us that specific contexts (namely the defining of Black Film), and certain periods and generic productions of Black Film historiography have been devalued (Lott, 1999) and misunderstood (Diawara, 1993) within the Film industry, film theory outside of Black Film Studies fails to address the validity of Black Film production (Lott 1999; Yearwood, 2000; Hooks, 1992; Gillespie 2007; Quinn, 2012; Jiles, 2013).

It remains the case, at the conclusion of this thesis, that little empirical research on Producers of Black Film, their filmmaking strategies, and investments and emotional connections to the production of Black Film have been undertaken. Moreover, a substantial portion of the scholarship on Black Film contends that Black Film and theories relating to Black Film's 'social relevance' is fraught with struggles and distinctions over "good/bad imagery", defining Black Film, audience reception, countering negative stereotypes, representation, ideology, authenticity or essential aesthetics. However, these accounts have rarely considered the perspectives from Producers of Black Film in these debates, and how they might negotiate the practices, beliefs and discourses as media producers (Caldwell, 2008). Indeed, it is the significance of these omissions that structured the practice-based nature of this thesis when obtaining the perspectives from Producers of Black Film to deconstruct and construct how the idea of Black Film Cognition and counter-narratives could be used to frame, form, and define contemporary Black Film in recent filmmaking practices.

Process

Central to this research has been a continual engagement with practice, which created the research data and forms half of the final written thesis submission, the inclusion of *Conversations in Black* which presents perspectives from the Producers of Black Film, and my reflections as researcher and practitioner. It is debatable whether the method employed here is without exception in its ability to address the research question posed. I am unaware of any previous production or film study on Black Film that involves the production of a 'film' for the purpose of examining the perspectives from Producers of Black Film regarding challenges and issues they address during the creative process, development and production of Black Film.

As I identified in my Introduction and Chapter 1, my research draws upon approaches from cultural industries' scholarship (Hesmondhalgh, 2005, 2013), and the mixed-methods research Caldwell (2008) utilised primarily through ethnography⁵², and qualitative interviews of 'below-the-line' workers in the film industry. Due to the lack of literature on the production of Black Film, I utilised a mixed-methods approach to develop an understanding of the filmmaking process and perspectives that I have referred to as Black Film Cognition. This thesis endeavoured to explore this field, and, at the same time, present how these individuals deconstruct the language of Black Film through using counter-narratives as defined by Critical Race Theory.

In undertaking my research, the nature of my practice-based research adapted the multi-faceted qualitative research approach of the 'bricoleur'; undertaking a survey of selected Producers of Black Film, conducting filmed interviews, observing rehearsal activities of certain experienced mid-level career industry professionals, participating in filmmaking workshops, reflecting critically upon my own film practice, analysing film and editing techniques, and reviewing a wide range of literature in both Media and Film Studies and the related fields of Black Film and Critical Race Theory. This methodology has been adapted, in an attempt to illuminate the complex perspectives and observations discussed by a range of Producers of Black Film. Critical Race Theory was the framework used for the analysis and the interpretation of the data in this study. The data consisted of interview transcripts, timeline, documents, photographs, and e-mail conversations. Communicating the findings in qualitative interview studies, is the result of constructing the experiences and meanings of events through the eyes of the

⁵² In *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Caldwell is interested in the industrial and social group represented by film and television workers below-the-line, and the interpretative frameworks that inform self-analysis of their creative practice. Ironically Race is not one of those frameworks.

participants in a manner that portrays a representation of their experiences. Each participant's counter-narratives were created to highlight relevant patterns reflected in their experiences.

The writing around the participants' experiences and the interrogation of data, allowed for identification of patterns that were consistent with each participant's story and their individual unique details. The findings revealed:

1. A varied and differing discussion about the definition of Black Film and how the term, while embraced by some, proved limiting and problematic for others.
2. Black Film was constituted in relation to who was involved in the filmmaking process. This included, but was not limited to, the writer, director, producers, editor, cinematographer, production companies, financiers and talent.
3. Black Films are produced to convey certain messages about 'Blackness' and Black identity that creators want to be viewed or seen as universal narratives, similar to 'mainstream films'.
4. Producers of Black Film sought to redirect one-dimensional gazes of Blacks by presenting various storylines, narratives and characterisation often not seen in 'non-Black Films'.
5. The recent box office successes and critical acclaim from several Black Films continue to defy industry expectations and challenge diversity issues in front of and behind the camera regarding story and film narratives, budgeting and distribution.

My involvement as researcher/filmmaker also had a critical function in its own right. As previously stated, I have attempted at all times to filter out my own ontological and epistemological assumptions regarding the production of Black Film, with a view to identifying filmmaking practices and perspectives as accurately as possible given some of the constraints of the

study. While there are acknowledged limitations of my involvement as both director/filmmaker and researcher to follow, my experience of making *Conversations in Black* involved making editorial choices when filming the interviews and selecting film clips, archive footage, music and designing graphics which example my own engagement with Black Film Cognition and the counter-narrative to anecdotes and industry discourse around Black Film. While I find it difficult to attempt to break down my creative process into a logical written explanation, I do know, that in my interpretation of Black Film Cognition and the counter-narrative, I have tried to disrupt the essentialist/anti-essentialist debate that continues to surface when addressing the 'validity' of Black Film.

In the editing process, I contemplated several possibilities for how I thought scenes and perspectives should be observed. The final edit was revised several times with special effects and film stills, and news clips were added to scenes and my presence was added. This particular performative/narrative structure that I pursued, favoured juxtaposing the responses from those interviewed with other re-purposed video and film clips, to help build and present Black Film Cognition as these participants had discussed. Scenes and film clips were based on articles, journals and literature that I reviewed in Chapter 2, filmed interviews that I found while researching participants I wanted to speak to, and industry events where Producers of Black Film were in attendance. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, two recent documentaries inspired the narrative structure I employed to develop my creative process, by favouring secondary data (interviews, archive footage, print-based articles, photographs and film clips) to construct story narratives and structure using the participants to observe and then present their unique perspectives when discussing Black Film. The process is, undeniably as I can see in retrospect, a statement on what I as a filmmaker and researcher believe

Black Film Cognition is, and how these producers of Black Film demonstrate counter-narrative with regards to Black Film production. The significance of this comment is, potentially, of similar importance to the written or filmed thesis components that are further examples of Black Film Cognition and the culmination of counter-narratives as voiced by the participants throughout the film and literature.

Summary of Black Film Cognition and Counter-Narratives

Conversations in Black is an exploration of Black Film and the filmmaking practices of individuals engaged in the areas of creating, development and production of Black Film. The primary goal of this creative research project was to produce a film that would both facilitate and reflect key research outcomes.

At the conclusion of this research journey, it is important to evaluate the success of *Conversations in Black* in facilitating a deeper understanding of Black Film Cognition that produced counter-narratives from the perspective of those participating in this study. Solórzano and Yosso (2009) outline their construction of a counter-story as a research method, piecing together excerpts from primary and secondary sources in such a way as to create a fictional dialogue with characters who represent the themes of the research.

The use of Black Film Cognition for this research allowed for the emergence of a core category of industry-related perspectives pertaining to the following key themes: defining Black Film, story and film narratives, and issues of race/diversity, agency and identity as illustrated in **Error! Reference source not found.**

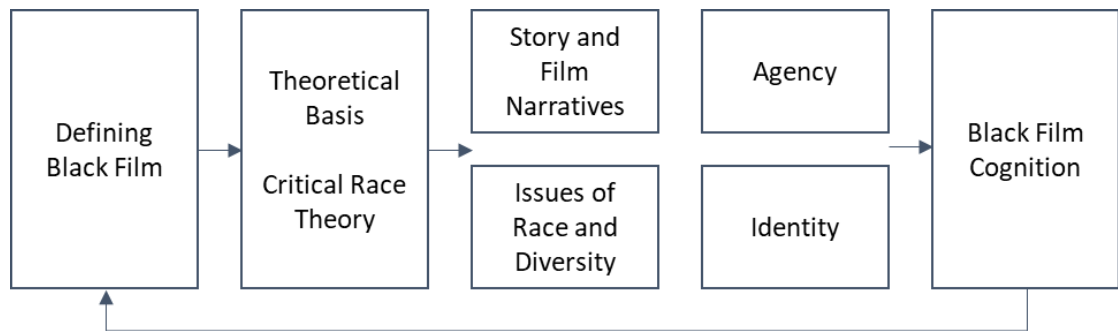


Figure 12 - Process Outline

In addition to reviewing literature on Black Film, Critical Race Theory, Media and Film Studies, my initial method for this written analysis was to compare responses from the original survey and questionnaire of selected Producers of Black Film that I had contacted in order to conduct filmed interviews, attend film festivals, observe participants on set or in the field, and then the creation of the filmed artefact.

For this practice-based study, I was concerned with how industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production perceive the challenges of producing Contemporary Black Film. As stated in the Introduction, there has been a clear lack of critical reflection or research engaging the film practices from Producers of Black Film in this area within Media and Film Studies. Gray's (1995) definition of "Blackness" was used as a reference, to understand the collection of "productions, histories, images, representations, and meanings that are associated with Black presence and cultural traditions".

Considerable discourse has taken place concerning what should, can, or should not be classified as Black Film since its origins. In this research, it was not my intention to define Black Film but to ask the perspectives of those who participated, how they would respond to the question.

Recent controversy has resurfaced surrounding the relevance of Black Film and how Producers of Black Film create, develop and produce within an industry that seemingly devalues or marginalises films labelled 'Black'. Most

of the commentary critiques not only the function of Black Film, but also its aesthetics and values. Essentially, the overarching question focusing on what makes a Black Film a 'good' Black Film, resides in the ways that Black Film is perceived in accordance with how film producers, critics and audience think that it should function, be presented, or be defined. As demonstrated in Iverem (2007) and Reid's (1993) assessment of Black Film, the definitions and interpretations of the term 'Black Film' are fluid.

The core category that emerged in this study reflected diverse positions and attention to defining Black Film, agency, story and narratives, identity, and issues of diversity within the realm of filmmaking practices associated with Black Film. The category I coined as 'Black Film Cognition' emerged consistently through my interviews. Within these perspectives, filmmakers who were participants had different actions, interactions, consequences, strategies, and situational factors that they have experienced. In this form of counter-narrative and storytelling, filmmakers presented and discussed various narratives that existed with regards to challenges and issues they had to address as Producers of Black Film, and secondly, as non-White filmmakers. Terri Francis raises this issue in her essay "*Whose 'Black Film' Is This? The Pragmatics and Pathos of Black Film Scholarship*," in which she notes, "Even when discussing the successful careers... of black filmmakers, the dominant tones of film analysis remain the rubrics of misrepresentation and burden."

Therefore, reading *Conversations in Black* both as a film text and as a filmmaking experience, is important in understanding it as an exploration of Black Film Cognition, and producing the participants' counter-narratives was the primary goal. The Black Film Cognition and counter-narratives engaged participants based on dialogue, location, age or appearance of characters, film aesthetics, or the use of repurposed primary and secondary data to elicit emotion and meaning in the viewer.

Limitations of This Study

There were a number of limitations on what I set out to achieve in this study, that I will acknowledge in order to present my conclusions with a judicious degree of awareness.

First, the interpretation of the research findings as presented in *Conversations in Black* and the written thesis are solely my own, rather than those of a team of researchers who could potentially identify the unwanted possibility of personal bias overlooking or misinterpreting useful findings. The questionnaire, surveys and filmed interviews, which are in many ways qualitative in nature, were my primary data sources. Part of my argument is based on what would be termed 'circumstantial and anecdotal evidence', as I have also drawn certain conclusions on the basis of what a number of Producers of Black Film have said and done in other contexts, particularly in relevant interviews. This was important, because some of the Producers of Black Film I most wanted to include did not respond to my survey, were not available for filming, or provided limited participation by referencing discussions of their influential work via journals, news reports, or electronic press junkets.

As I was unable to access several of the most famous Producers of Black Film, the survey participants (who varied widely in experience and output) responded in varying levels of detail. The Producers of Black Film chosen for the study were all professionals with whom I have worked previously or had a pre-existing academic relationship. I chose not to approach filmmakers I did not know personally, for reasons of time, and also in the hope that the filmmakers who knew me personally as a colleague and scholar would be particularly motivated to answer questions and be interviewed within the timescale I required. The number of years as a Producer of Black Film ranged from 5-25 years. The majority of participants resided on the West Coast, and

three of the four filmed participants resided on the East Coast. All of the filmmakers identified as one or more of the following filmmaking positions: director, producer, actor, casting director, cinematographer, writer and/or editor. Several network executives and film companies I approached were not accessible or responsive to emailed request. The absence of network or film executives from the group may have restricted the scope of Black Film Cognition and potential counter-narratives, or it may have widened it. For this research, I am therefore left to speculate whether a Producer of Black Film with years of experience might have had a conspicuously different approach or response than the executive from the network or film company. Therefore, the participants depicted in *Conversations in Black* represent different levels of experience in relation to position, credits, status and film aesthetics.

Secondly, my primary role as filmmaker and researcher put me in a distinctive position of having a more engaged understanding of the potential outcomes of the study than the participants selected for my research. This was a necessary consideration to keep in mind when analysing the interviews and the counter-narratives that each response demonstrated. Throughout development of the narrative structure, and primarily in the editing process, I remained aware of these limitations and how they impacted my own choices in demonstrating *Conversations in Black* as a counter-narrative and my perception of Black Film Cognition. Additionally, my instruction to participants answering either the survey questions or interview questions, in my choice of language and degree of openness to discussing their potential responses, may have influenced their understanding of Black Film Cognition. As a result, the participants may have each interpreted my questions or instructions differently.

Whilst the determinant of how significant or not a particular perspective might be is subjective, I consider my decision to present how these

individuals' various responses construct and deconstruct the language of Black Film a significant counter-narrative advancing Black Film Cognition.

Furthermore, with the dual nature of my involvement as filmmaker/researcher, I also considered the filmmaking style, combining interviews, film clips, remediation of film and news clips into performative/narrative film examples of Black Film Cognition and counter-narrative.

Thirdly, this is not what would be classified as a 'longitudinal' study, exploring a series of projects over time, but a portrait based on the interviewees in a single period, with all the limitations that that presents. However, the questions were devised specifically to try to draw out the interviewees' experience over several projects, rather than limiting their answers to an individual film or case study. Given the subject matter of this thesis, the interrogation strategies of surveys and interviews were the most obvious strategies to use to obtain the most critical information. Within the scope of this study, my survey was never intended to be quantitative in nature, so the qualitative component of the interviews did not distort the other results of the survey. The research data focused mainly on interviews with producers, actors, directors, cinematographers, writers and editors, but not as many executives (I did not receive responses from several I contacted).

Ideally, a further study should be carried out to interview more Producers of Black Film and explore their perception of their relationships with other development practitioners during development and production. The research does not claim to be based on a wholly representative sample, and was partly dependent on existing contacts, referrals and recommendations, and influenced by the self-selection of those who agreed to be interviewed (most agreed, but a few did not, citing work pressures).

Finally, whilst working creatively throughout the development of *Conversations in Black*, I purposefully did not give much thought to what my

own practices were beyond the interview questions I solicited from respondents and participants. During the interviews and interactions with potential participants, I encouraged them to speak freely and with no reservation, as their voices in the affirmative or negative were within the parameters of this study.

This study used responses from the questionnaire to survey participant narratives, and it is important to point out that each counter-narrative is not intended to be a representation of a certain group; thus, they cannot be generalised. If identity research reveals anything, it is that each person's social identity is a collection of different social markers and varies tremendously over time and based on context. Thus, the voices that have been included in this study have served the primary purpose of providing an alternative version of the master narrative regarding the production context, and how these producers position themselves within the development of Black Film and the way these Producers of Black Film demonstrate Black Film Cognition in their work.

While I did take into consideration gender, race, sexual orientation and ethnicity of the participants, I was not rigorous in my approach. I aimed to keep some sort of balance by selecting Producers of Black Film who had experience, and at least one credit working in or on a Black Film production. Whilst these factors were loosely considered, it was the aim of the project that if any or all of these factors impacted how respondents viewed or verified Black Film, their responses to the questions and survey would be reflected in their answers. As a result, the responses from the survey and questionnaire varied; with 60% of the respondents claiming African American descent, 20% claiming mixed or dual heritage, 15% claiming Hispanic descent, and 5% claiming White or European heritage. The filmed interviews consisted of five individuals (two producers, one production designer/wardrobe, one

cinematographer/editor, and one director). There were two Black female producers, one production designer/wardrobe of dual heritage (Black and White), one Black male director, and one Black male cinematographer/editor. Within this group of five participants, they have Black Films released in the United States and internationally. While the intent was to gain a larger pool of respondents, I believe this to be a conscientious mix of people to help explore the aims of this study. It would have been beyond the scope of this thesis to ensure that all groups were recognised.

Recommendations

There is a renaissance occurring in the making of Black Films. The narratives are representative of a diverse group wanting to increase their understanding and knowledge of Blacks.

The Film Studies programmes offered by a variety of private and collegiate institutions have great Black Films to choose from, that are representative of the change in our society. These narratives and counter-narratives are needed to bring about an understanding of the various cultures. Recommendations for future research centre around the use of digital media to conduct research. Understanding the various platforms of social media that can be used to conduct research needs more exploration, strategies, and ethical guidelines to ensure that the information presented is following an honest and truthful manner.

Another major area is the change in demographics. The largest-growing population is bi-racial individuals. When we talk about Race, the concept of intersectionality will play an extremely important consideration in how Black films will be viewed in the future.

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Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Research Project: To Remake, Reconstruct or Revolution: What is the 'Black' in Black Film

Researcher:

Martin L. Tease

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University of East Anglia,

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Supervisors:

Dr. Keith Johnston:

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Outline:

I am currently undertaking post doctorate research in the Film, Television and Media Department at the University of East Anglia. My practice-based research focuses on Contemporary Black Film. My central research question focuses on the search for the model that Producers of Black Film utilize to create, develop, and distribute their movies. The title of the research is: To Remake, Reconstruct or Revolution: What is the 'Black' in Black Film. I will be seeking Academics of Black Film Theory and Producers of Black Film Content

who have created at least one film or are in the process of creating a film for future release. The participant must be at least 18 years of age.

The interviews will not take place beginning late 2014 and mid-March 2015, pending approval from the Ethics Review Board. However, I was hoping to engender your interest and support. Specifically, if you are interested in participating, or know of someone who meets the criteria, please let me know by responding to this email or calling me directly.

It is important to note that participation is voluntary and offers no compensation. However, participation in this study will be extremely valuable to the exploration of Contemporary Black Film as well as creating a dialogue regarding the impact and social responsibility of Black filmmakers.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Martin L. Tease

Associate Tutor

University of East Anglia



Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Consent for Research Study

“To Remake, Reconstruct or Revolution: What is the ‘Black’ in Black Film –Central Research question: How industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production perceive the challenges of producing Contemporary Black Film

I _____, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Martin L. Tease, under the direction of Dr. Keith Johnston and Dr. Melanie Williams.

_____ **I agree to be recorded for the purpose of this study**

_____ **I do not agree to be recorded for the purpose of this study**

The purpose of this study is to research how industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production perceive the challenges of producing Contemporary Black Film. There will be approximately 25 Producers of Black Film Content who will be participating in this study and all will be over 18 years of age.

The questions included in interviews deal with, but are not limited to, the following: the methods of the filmmaker, defining, critiquing and theorizing Black Film, the challenges of producing, creating Black Film, what types of messages and portrayals the filmmaker incorporates into their films and how they feel about the images of Blacks in current commercial or independent released films. The duration of this study can take from 30-60 minutes to complete. All of the responses will be digitally recorded, videotaped or filmed (with the permission of the participant) during a face to face, phone or email interviews.

The researcher will ask approximately 20 open-ended questions that deal with the subject matter described at the beginning of the procedures section. The participant will be asked to respond to these questions for any length of time with their insights, personal experiences, and opinions. Follow up questions may be asked by the researcher for clarification purposes. Due to the length of the interview the participant has the right to request rest periods or breaks at

any time. Once the interview has been completed the participant may request a copy of the transcript of the interview for their own personal records. The researcher will provide the participant with this information after the study has been completed.

Participants will not be offered compensation of any kind for participating in this study. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records via fax, email, or through duplicate copies signed during the interview. There is minimal risk with regard to the participation of this study. At most, the participant may experience boredom or mental fatigue when being filmed. At best, your participation will help validate my research and evidence how contemporary Black Film is being debated from the participant's perspective.

PARTICIPATION is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. In the event of physical injury: I understand that in the EVENT OF PHYSICAL INJURY resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatment may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.

Participant Name (Print): _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher:

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate.

_____ Principal Investigator

Date

For answers to pertinent questions about the research and your rights you may contact the following persons:

Dr. Keith Johnston: keith.johnston@uea.ac.uk

Dr. Melanie Williams: melanie.williams@uea.ac.uk

Martin L. Tease, (Researcher): M.Tease@uea.ac.uk

Phone: 323.786.3905



Appendix C: Consent Form Checklist

1. I have read the information sheet about this research project and agree to participate in the described aspects of the research.
2. The purpose, nature and duration of the research have been explained to me.
3. I understand that all research publications as a result of this project will only use data.
4. I agree to allow statements I have made during an interview to be published in academic journals, used for conferences and other relevant publications for this research project.
5. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time during, before or after the research by contacting the researcher Martin Tease or my assigned research advisors.
6. I can confirm that I am over 18 years of age.

Organization:

Participant.....

Date.....

Signature.....



Appendix D: Debrief Notice

Research Project: To Remake, Reconstruct or Revolution: What is the 'Black' in Black Film

Researcher: Martin L. Tease,
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Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. Your contributions will be used for the development of a visual based artefact and only within academic publications. Primarily the results will be included in my Ph.D. dissertation that shall be submitted for examination and available in the University of East Anglia Library for public access after I have completed my degree (from July 2016).

You are reminded that you may withdraw your involvement up until the editing process in early July 2014 by contacting me either by phone or email on the above provided details or by contacting one of my advisors (see above).

I may need to contact individuals and organizations again for further clarification of issues discussed during filming or while interviewing. If you do not wish me to contact you again then please let me know by contacting me via email.

If you have any concerns about this research, then please feel free to contact me at any time.

Thanks again for your co-operation,

Martin L. Tease
Associate Tutor & PGR
School of Film, Television and Media
University of East Anglia



Appendix E: Proposed Interview Questions

Instructions

This study deals with how industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production perceive the challenges of producing Contemporary Black Film. The interviewer will ask you the 20 questions listed below that pertain to the study previously described. You will be asked to provide open ended responses to the questions that you are being presented with. Your responses will be recorded digitally or filmed for the purpose of visual based artefact. This interview will take 30-60 minutes to complete. A copy of your interview may be provided upon request after the close of this study. You can choose to stop your participation in this study at any time without consequence. Should you choose to do so, your name and the titles or experience you have listed will not be shared with any other person other than the researcher. This information will then be used anonymously for identification purposes for the researcher.

Please select one of the following options:

☐ I AGREE to be recorded for the purpose of this interview

☐ I DO NOT AGREE to be recorded for the purpose of this interview

Please specify all filmmaking positions that you have held or currently identify as:

___ Director ___ Producer ___ Actor

___ Casting Director ___ Cinematographer ___ Editor

___ Other (Please Specify): _____

Age: _____

Gender: ___ Male ___ Female

Ethnicity:

How many years have you been filmmaker?

Name of film projects you've completed and/or released:

Please answer the following questions:

1. How do you define Black Film?
2. In your film or body of work, what do you believe are the major themes?
3. Why did you choose this particular story to present these themes?
4. What do you believe should be a filmmaker's major objective when he/she makes a film?
5. What differences do you see between the Black Films of today versus earlier films? Why do you think these differences exist?
6. Why do you think these differences exist?
7. Does Hollywood or audiences prefer select images or narratives pertaining to the Black Culture?
8. Does Black Film challenge stereotypes or dominant ideologies about Black life and culture?

9. How does Black Film embody stereotypes and dominant ideologies that may include or exclude viewers?
10. How do societal changes influence the message for films? Black films?
11. Do Black Films always have a message?
12. Is there intent to change the portrayal of Black characters in Black Film?
13. How important is it for the Black community to be captured in film?
14. Do you think that it is possible for someone who is not a part of the Black culture to make an accurate depiction that includes a majority Black cast, or deals with the Black culture?
15. Do Producers of Black Film have an obligation to the Black community?
16. How does Black Film embody stereotypes and dominant ideologies that may include or exclude viewers?
17. In your film or body of work, what do you believe are the major themes?
18. Why did you choose this particular story to present these themes?
19. What do you believe should be a filmmaker's major objective when he/she makes a film?
20. How important is the success of Black Films?

Researcher Use Only:

Comments:



Appendix F: Approved Ethics Committee Form

Date: March 21, 2015

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

UEA General Research Ethics Committee

To Whom It May Concern:

I am submitting this proposal to request ethics approval for practice- based research I am planning to design for my research To Remake, Reconstruct or Revolution: What is the 'Black' in Black Film.

Within this proposal, I have attached an outline of my research, ethical procedures regarding recruitment of participants, consent forms and Attached to this proposal you will find the outlines of my research, recruitment and ethical procedures, an introductory letter for those wishing to participate and release form for participants to sign.

Research Aims and Objectives:

The nature of my research questions how industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production perceive the challenges of producing Contemporary Black Film. This research focuses on the belief that Black Film is largely devalued and misunderstood within the Film industry and that film theory outside of Black Film Studies fails to address the validity of Black Film criticisms. This research is structured to confront questions regarding identity, ideology, representation and stereotypes— common themes and characteristics associated within Black Film. Focusing on both producers of Black Film

content and practice-based enquiry, it is the goal of this research to examine creatively and theoretically how producers of Black Film present significant and problematic deconstructions of Blackness through film. More specifically, my research evaluates how 'Black content' and 'Black Film' are conceptualized within and across filmmaking traditions, creative processes and then how I cross-examine these in my practice-based research.

Drawing on the works of Donald Bogle, W. E. B. Du Bois, Stuart Hall, bell hooks, Tommy Lott and Gladstone Yearwood, my research evidences how producers of Black Film Content and theory of Black Film permeates the creation, the development and production processes that may affect Black Film. By this, I plan to interview both producers of Black Film Content and Academics to engage with several debates about Black Film along the lines of aesthetics, criticisms, production processes and how contemporary Black Film has evolved. By taking a practice based approach to my research, I juxtapose Black Film Theory within a framework of Critical Race Theory and Qualitative Interview methods to document how producers of Black Film content reflect and respond to the filmmaking process associated with Black Film. Research will include:

- Qualitative in-depth interviews with academics and film-based practitioners who have been identified and chosen at random and through professional relationships
- Qualitative analysis of production data.
- Independent development of research network and research participants
- The creation of a visual artefact to be used as a visual aid and tool for this research

Widening the theoretical aims this research, the production of a visual based artefact is designed to observe, document and present evidence the way in which participants discuss relevant film theory, work within the development process and support the filmmaking process of Black Film.

The aim is to understand how the debate over Black Film fits into a more public debate within film theory and whether academics, producers of Black Film Content and the film industry support or contest Black Film based upon the models practiced exemplified by these producers of content this research is based on.

The catalyst for this project is based on practice based research methodology where the research practitioner is additionally apart of the research subject. By combining both of these elements (practitioner along with being the primary researcher), this project endeavours to create and produce a visual based artefact as a result of the research. This is an artefact beyond the written dissertation itself. This artefact is something created by the practitioner — created as a result of, or enhanced by, the research of the practitioner. The overall aim of this practice based research is a learning experience for the practitioner/researcher, with the production of a visual artefact of this research on Black Film and its conclusions. The accompanying written dissertation is an exploratory and explanatory documentation of the research process, and a recording of its goals, results and conclusions.

Recruitment and Ethics

(i) *Ethical Considerations*

Creswell (2009) indicates that participants and the sites for research need to be respected as data is collected. Because many ethical issues can occur during this stage of research, it becomes important not to place participants at risk as well as respect vulnerable populations. For this study, this proposal will be reviewed by the ethics committee to assess the potential for risk: physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal harm to the participants I have identified or indicated for this study. In writing this proposal, my research follows the university policies to ensure that the rights of all participants are properly respected and adhere to appropriate practices set forth by the University of East Anglia.

Lindlof and Taylor (2010) state ethical issues of qualitative research do not differ from other forms of social science approaches. Although, considered low risk, various challenges may arise based upon the relationship between investigator and participant in qualitative based interviews. These may be caused if or when questions delve into illegal or otherwise incriminating activity, matters of personal privacy (e.g. sexual practices), mislead, misrepresent or distort past events that have caused psychological trauma (e.g.

rape incident). In order to minimize these ethical concerns in this research, the follow steps were taken:

- Prior to inviting subjects to participate in this study, the researcher will be reviewed and approved by the University of East Anglia Ethics Committee by submitting an ethics based research proposal with all supporting documents.
- In compliance with ethics committee guidelines and in accordance with UEA policy on research including participants, every respondent will be given informed consent forms and made aware of their rights to protections under federal, state, and university laws. Per their agreement, the researcher will receive permission to use information obtained in the interviews for the purpose of the study.

A copy of the informed consent document is attached to this proposal

This includes an informed consent form with identification of the researcher, the university where the research is being conducted, how participants were selected, the purpose of the research and benefits to participants if any, a risk assessment, confidentiality guarantee to the participants, rights to withdraw from research, contact details if participants have questions or concerns.

Creswell (2009)

- The identities of all participants will be kept confidential per their request. Where requested, the researcher will use those interviews wishing to confidential as survey data marked with a number that corresponds to a specific subject. This number will be placed in the box at the end of the survey that says "For researcher use only." An example will be provided. In addition, the names of the participants are known by the researcher and will not be shared with any outside audiences where requested. Otherwise, the researcher will request that all participants agree to be filmed, taped, or recorded for the accompanying visual based artefact.
- All records and contact details of the participants will be protected in accordance with university requirements. Where applicable, this information is electronically stored on the researcher's personal computer or smartphone device. All information is password protected. After the close of this study all of the pertinent research documents will be purged from the researcher's computer files.

The participants for this study are producers of Black Film content. This researcher included the following positions within the definition of a producer of Black Film Content: director, producer, casting director, actor, cinematographer, writer, and editor. For the purposes of this study, those I refer to as academics or critiques of Black Film Theory, have written, teach, theorized or published articles on or about Black Film. I will interview and analyse these individuals as evidence because of their relationship (academically, professionally, and critically) to Black Film, Black Films' target audience, and their ability to utilize a majority Black cast by writing directing, and producing to construct themes and story's involving Black culture.

(ii) Acquisition of Research Participants

The research targets individuals and filmic processes that specifically have been key elements in producing Black Film. I will produce a survey or chart that will allow the participants to also specify any other positions that they may have held that do not fall within the positions that were previously listed. The Producers of Black Film content needed to have released at least one film or was in the process of creating, developing or producing a film for future release. For the purpose of this research, those persons who identified as academic or critic provided a sample of writing, published an article, teach or theorize Black Film were considered for this study. Overall for this study, those participants who have critiqued, theorized, created, produced or developed Black Film are identified as preferred persons of interest. The following is a list of potential participants who have been contacted for this study. This research will not approach minors and only official spokespersons for the following organizations and users of said organizations over the age of 18 years will be approached for interviews.

x = consent has been given

Offer made = request has been sent but no confirmation of participation has been confirmed

Offer to be made = potential participant was suggested and request to participate is being created

Name:	Occupation:	Confirmed:
Erika Alexander	Actress/Producer	x
Debbie Allen	Director/Producer	x

Bryan Barber	Director	x
Twinkie Byrd	Casting Director	x
Sheldon Candis	Director	x
Reuben Canon	Casting Director	x
Kristiene Clarke	Director/Lecturer	x
Ava DuVernay	Executive Producer	Offer made
Idris Elba	Actor	Offer made
Debbie Allen	Director, Producer, Choreographer	Offer made
Isaac Julien	Director	x
Jeff Johnson	Producer	x
Jacquie Frisco Hapsberg	Producer	x
Warren Hudlin	Filmmaker, Producer, Director	x
Steve McQueen	Director/Producer	Offer made
Joe Morton	Actor	Offer made
Jake Nava	Director	x
Will Packer	Producer	x
Nakiya Ramsey	Producer	X
Gingi Rochelle	Producer	X
Nzinga Stewart	Director	x
Tim Story	Director	x
Sean Patrick Thomas	Actor/Producer	x
Roger Ubina	Producer	x
Fatimah Washington	Producer/Director	x
Joyce Washington	Producer	x
Erik White	Director	x
Anissa Williams	Casting Director	x

Name:	Occupation:	Confirmed:
Dr. Todd Boyd	University of Southern California	X
Orville Lloyd Douglas	Columnist	X
Professor Paul Gilroy	Kings College London	Offer to be made
Dr. Ricardo Guthrie	Northern Arizona University	x
Professor John Howard	Kings College London	Offer made
Dr. Claire Hynes	University of East Anglia	X
Peter Kramer	University of East Anglia	Offer made
Demetria L. Lucas	Columnist	Offer made
Laura McDonald	University of Portsmouth	Offer to be made
Tambay A. Obenson	Shadow and Act, Industry Journal	Offer to be made
Dr. John Seeley	University of Exeter/Director	x
Andre Seewood	Author – Black Film Critic	x
Dr. Kimberly Scott	Arizona State University/ AZ Black Film Festival	x

Further potential participants include spokespersons for movie studios and production companies that create, produce and distribute Black Film.

- **African American Film Festival Releasing Movement**

AFFRM is a distribution collective of Black arts organizations dedicated to producing two Black Independent Films per year. The second film to be distributed from this collective directed by Ava DuVarney won best director award at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival.

- **CodeBlack Entertainment**

Started in 2009, CodeBlack Entertainment is the first independent, vertically integrated African-American-owned film studio, actively engaged in the business of feature film production, film distribution, worldwide DVD and digital assets distribution, urban marketing consulting and a production of programs for television broadcast and syndication

- **Lionsgate**

Lionsgate was formerly known as Cinépix Film Properties is a Canadian-American film production/distribution studio and a division of [Lions Gate Entertainment](#). Reported as the largest and most successful mini-major film studio in North America, Lionsgate focuses on foreign and independent films and has distributed various commercially successful film series produced and directed by filmmaker Tyler Perry

- **Weinstein Company**

The Weinstein Company is a multimedia production and Distribution Company launched in October 2005 by Bob and Harvey Weinstein, the brothers who founded Miramax Films in 1979. Notably, The Weinstein Company distributed several Black Films Django Unchained, Lee Daniels the Butler, Fruitvale Station, Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom

(ii) Sample of stock questions for each group:

- What is the purpose of Black Film Theory?
- What kinds of Black Film do you produce?
- Do the producers of Black Film content or the studios that produce Black Film, use film to educate, enlighten, or entertain? Are they concerned with representation and the role it plays in identifying formation?
- Do Black Film Aesthetics obstruct the creation or development of Black Film?
- Will Black Film ever be recognized within the lines of mainstream film?
- Do producers of Black Film have a sense of social responsibility regarding the content of their films?
- Are you concerned with how Black culture is reflected in film?

- Does the filmmaker, academic or studio promote the depiction of one type of Black Film over another (e.g. Historical, Comedy, Remake, Biography, and Drama)? Why or Why not?

(iii) An Exit Strategy: Individual Debrief

At the end of each meeting with the consenting participant, I will administer a debrief document to all participants involved. The debrief thanks participants for engaging with the study and further reminds them of their right to withdraw, the anonymity of their responses and where the results of the study will be published. It also provides the contact information of my advisors and myself long with the appropriate dates for publication and their deadline to withdraw (Appendix C).

(iv) Analysing the Data

Upon the completion of visual artefact, the research will utilize a Comparative Analysis Method, as described by Sondergaard and Torfing (2000) to code and analyse recorded observations, filmed responses and open interviews amongst all the participants.

For Sondergaard and Torfing, Comparative analysis can be performed on various materials from interviews to letters, diaries to public documents and to observations of various forms of media (movies, newspaper articles and professional literature).

This research is being designed to obtain and document the intentions, feelings, purposes and comprehension of those participants being interviewed. According to Repstad and Ryen this makes the qualitative interview a preferred method of collecting empirical data because it offers insights into how individual interviewees interpret themselves and how they interpret the phenomenon under study. The research will first categorize the data between the three areas of participation. Each category will be analyzed and coded before a discursive analysis across all categories begins. This means that the filmed observations and interviews will be coded within their own merits. This ordering the empirical data is relevant because the focus is on the method or the technique of collecting data (Repstad 1987).

Throughout this phase of analysis, empirical data collected via the interviews will compare how each participant evaluates the same social phenomena (Black Film and the production process).

The analysis of the data is used as a strategic method for generating a knowledge transfer-based approach. This will encompass the third stage of data analysis where the interview responses provide development and new application of the central debates of the literature review and dominant theories concerning Black Film and the production process.

(v) Validating Data

Given the process for obtaining the research, methods validation of the data, interview responses in particular, may be difficult to validate. Themes and activities noted throughout participant observation however can and will be cross referenced with the appropriate participants when and where appropriate. The goal is to maintain an open link with the participants during the following year, or the write up year (2014-2015). Email, skype or phone will be the only way to validate any data as returning to the field may not be feasible.

Upon completion of the written dissertation and the VIVA process, the participants and institutions will once again be contacted and thanked for their participation. They will have access to the finished product upon contacting me and this is noted in the information letter and will again be included in the final email to the responsible agent and in the debrief letter.

Once ethics has been approved, these documents (apart from initial contact which has since been sent) will be sent to the targeted research participants. Following are the sample documents: Appendix A, Participant Information Sheet; Appendix B Participant Consent Form; Appendix C, Consent Form Check list; Appendix D, Debrief Document, Appendix E. Proposed Interview Questions

Appendix G: Interview Questions and Response to the Research Question

How do industrial practitioners involved in Black Film production perceive the challenges of producing Contemporary Black Film?

The following responses address the research question. Where possible, the Filmmakers responded to the questions either in the affirmative or the negative. Many of the Filmmakers provided some explanation regarding their answers and provide the rationale behind them where possible. The analysis of the questionnaire and surveys from the interviews produced diverse perspectives around the two major overarching themes demonstrating Black Film Cognition and presenting several counter-narratives.

The approach to interviewing participants allowed for a meaningful discussion on the essence of their current experiences revolving around Black Film, their interpretation of Black Film production and a reflection on the impact of filming 'Blackness'. Following a two-step process as outlined by Smith & Osborn (2007), the interpretive analysis explored the participant's responses and how they interpret their filmmaking practice and the researcher explores and tries to understand how the participants interpret their responses. Therefore these findings reflect the voice of the participants as captured through the key themes that were categorized based on what they expressed during the interviews, questionnaire and surveys. This current chapter is laid out in such a way to capture the essence of the participants' perspective through the research questions without altering their perspectives in any way.

In order to understand the findings based on the questionnaire and interviews, Figure 2. examples how the interview questions coincide with the

themes outlined as Black Film Cognition to address the primary research question.

Black Film Cognition	Interview Questions
Defining Black Film	Question 1, 5, 6, 8, 11, 14, 16, 17
Story and Narrative	Question 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 16, 17
Identity	Question 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15
Race/Diversity	Question 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15
Agency	Question 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17

Figure 2. Research to interview question