**School of Arts & Media**

**Practice as Research Centre of Excellence**

Research Timeline

**RESEARCHER: Simon Connor**

**UOA: D 33**

**OUTPUT: Action Space – The role of sound designer in documentary film**

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| ***Date*** | ***Research activities, points of dissemination and rationale for decisions*** |
| March 2015 | **Pre-production discussions with Filmmaker Huw Wahl**  Early discussions outlining the project, the potential of film production sound, the importance of sound to the film in terms of supporting the tactile and multisensory aspects, discussing the background and the importance of sound and music within the arts collective Action Space. |
| March/April 2015 | **Contextual research into ‘sound design’ in documentary**  Research into the role of documentary sound, following the work and writing of John Grierson (1966), Holly Rogers (2013) and the critical analysis of sound’s potential to enhance presence for the viewer/listener, e.g in ‘Two Years at Sea’ by Ben Rivers (2011). |
| April 2015 | **Test filming session at Architects of Air HQ; Nottingham**  Test filming and location sound recording within the unique space of an inflatable structure, to gain a sense of creative sonic potential and possible later challenges when filming proper. This included the unique and unpredictable acoustics of the structures and background noise of fans required for inflation etc. |
| July 2015 | **Filming and recording the build of a new inflatable structure at P3 Gallery, London**  Filming and location sound of building new Action Space inflatable structure for the film, included capturing in sonic detail the process of making and creativity, and interviewing founder members of the group (this is detailed in Item 2: Book chapter ‘Auralising Action Space’). |
| August 2015 | **Filming and recording musical performances inside the inflatable**  Filming and recording musical performances from Phil Minton and AMM as they improvised within the Action Space inflatable structure hosted at Blackheath Halls, London (this is detailed in Item 2: Book chapter ‘Auralising Action Space’). |
| September 2015 | **Sifting and selecting material for the Action Space archive performance**  Preparing a new tape montage for the soundtrack of the film; by selecting material from the Action Space audio archive for incorporation into a live performance using multiple tape loops and live audio processing (this is detailed in Item 2: Book chapter ‘Auralising Action Space’). |
| October 2015 | **Filming and recording theatrical performance inside the inflatable**  Filming and recording a theatre performance by founder Action Space member Ken Turner, hosted at the Chelsea School of Art, London. |
| November 2015 | **Editing / Mixing of AMM performance** forTrailer screening of Action Space at Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival**,** Heritage Quay. |
| Mar/April 2016 | **Sound Mix of Action Space**  Editing, post-production and mix of film. Involved standard technical processes (levelling, equalisation, transitions) as well as more creative inquiry into the sound design post-production techniques borrowed from feature film such as; Foley, layering, time and pitch manipulation of audio. These were to enhance the multisensory and tangible aspects required by the film (Chion, 1994), arrived at through creative play or through discussion and reflection of ideas with the filmmaker Huw Wahl (this is detailed in Item 2: Book chapter ‘Auralising Action Space’). |
| April 2016  April 2016 – present | **Premiere of Action Space at Flatpack Festival Birmingham, UK**  Also performed a live Audio-Visual set at the festival within the Action Space inflatable structure using the Action Space audio and film archive.  Ongoing screenings of film in UK and abroad (see Item 5: Action Space – Impact) |
| November 2016 | **Masterclass at Salford University**  Live Audio-Visual performance using Action Space audio and film archive with Huw Wahl, followed by lecture and Q&A to university students on the research project and creative process behind the performance. |
| January/ Feb 2017 | **Practice based presentation at Sound and Music in Documentary Film Symposium @ University of Huddersfield**  My presentation explored the definition of film ‘sound design’, charting its various incarnations since Walter Murch’s original conceptualisation of the role in the 1970s, before reflecting on the specifics of its use in documentary. Here I drew on specific examples from Action Space, whilst arguing that freedom from the divisions of labour and industrial hierarchies found in feature or large budget film, allowed for the budget documentary sound designer to take a more holistic approach. More akin to Murch’s original vision of the ‘sound designer’ as overall architect of the film’s soundtrack. |
| August – Dec 2017 | **Research and writing of book chapter “Auralising Action Space”**  For the book chapter I narrowed the focus of my practice, choosing to reflect on the themes of ‘play’ found throughout the sound design in the film. Also explored is the relevance of play to the ethos of the group Action Space. Other examples of innovative sound design and play are referred to in both documentary and non-documentary film. Comparisons are drawn between the holisitic approach taken by the low budget documentary sound designer and Walter Murch’s original conceptualisation of the role. This is put in contrast to the fragmented definition found in Hollywood or feature films today. |
| August 2018 | **‘Auralising Action Space: channelling a sense of play in documentary sound design’**  **book chapter published**  in *Soundings: documentary film and the listening experience.* Eds. Cox, Geoffrey and Corner, John. University of Huddersfield Press. |
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**Bibliography**

Chion, M., Gorbman, C., & Murch, W. (1994). *Audio-vision : sound on screen*. New York: Columbia

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Grierson, J., & Hardy, F. (1966). *Grierson on documentary* London: Faber and Faber.

Rivers, B. (2011) *Two Years At Sea.* UK: Soda Pictures/LUX

Rogers, H. (2013). Composing with reality: digital sound and music in documentary film. In *Zdok. 13* From: <https://blog.zhdk.ch/zdok/talk-video/2016-talk-video/english/2017/composing-with-reality-digital-> music-and-sound-in-documentary-film/