

STATEMENT

on the PhD dissertation of Stefan Vassilev Praskov (Goncharov)

2.1. Philology – Theory of Literature

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The dissertation “The Video Essay and the Idea of Criticism in the Digital Age: Attempts and Events”, submitted by Stefan Goncharov in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in 2.1. Philology (Theory of Literature) is a bold and astute study. It critically interrogates the categories of subjective experience, temporality, and self-reflection within the context of the contemporary digital-network situation. The work is acutely timely insofar as it seeks to reflect on the role of the subject in the rapidly evolving context of audiovisual genres, with a particular focus on the hybrid form of the video essay. The dissertation provides a robust cultural and historical foundation, tracing Montaigne’s long shadow on both the essay genre and the conceptualization of the modern subject’s elusive experiential as an event. The study also offers an extensive exploration of the emergence of video art in the 1960s and 1970s, presenting a rich catalogue of examples. It culminates in pragmatic case studies that meticulously analyze technical and technological tools in light of recent digital trends reshaping the landscape of (in)human experience on the web.

The essay, as a form of experience, is conceptualized as both a incisive and mediating form. Stefan Goncharov posits it as simultaneously mediating and un-masking the gaps between document and fiction, objectivity and subjectivity, science and art, criticism and creativity, representation and the unrepresentable. In this context, the video essay emerges as a critical instrument capable of peeling back layers, dismantling constructs, and creating ruptures, intervals, or interruptions in the ontological trajectories and automatisms of perception.

The theoretical framework of the study is informed by the ideas of Jacques Lacan and Alain Badiou, where the terms subject, world and event are juxtaposed with those of voice, gaze, desire, cut and extension, providing solid foundations for the chosen approach. The work's theme precisely focuses on concepts central to the theory of the subject, which is where the video essay's overarching problematic is developed. The exposition is characterized by intense self-reflection, the systematic deconstruction of theoretical frameworks, and the refinement and elaboration of the main propositions. Noteworthy aspects of the dissertation include its dynamic and plastic language, experimental writing style, profound engagement with the topic, and conceptual creativity that continually.

The dissertation is structured into an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, multimedia components, and an appendix, totaling 318 pages and including thirty-one illustrations. The introduction delineates the broad conceptual scope between the notions of “experience” and “event” in terms of their plurality within which the author situates audiovisual essayism. It effectively integrates the dual research perspectives of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Badiou's postcritical ontology. The range of influential figures is further expanded, including Lev Manovich, Timothy Corrigan, Nora M. Alter, Luke Arsenyuk, among others, who connect the video essay to issues of intervention and reflection on the public/private space. From the outset, Stefan Goncharov demonstrates a remarkable ability to conceptually and figuratively synthesize these diverse theoretical strands to capture the complex nature of the subject matter. This is further exemplified in his capacity to directly articulate the dissertation's objective: the exploration of “the essay as an (un)solvable ontological problem” (p. 7) through the development of a novel analytical framework. The thesis consistently clarifies its premises, guiding readers of varying backgrounds and experiences to engage with and comprehend the underlying stakes of the work.

The dissertation, through the lens of the video essay, examines and identifies the structure of the subject and the structure of time using Lacanian registers of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. Goncharov's impact extends beyond observing the intersections between linguistic material and the imaginative-phantasmatic layer. It lies in intervening between these layers as manifestations of the traumatic-real. The most productive aspect of the work appears when Lev Manovich's categories of montage and

transcoding are linked to Alain Badiou's concepts of the gap and the suture, revealing the lack between two incommensurable worlds (private and public, documentary and fictional, symbolic and imaginary). I would like to rise the question how suture, as an operation of de-/reconstruction, differs from the more traditional effect of defamiliarization in Shklovsky's terms. How do the two editorial techniques engage with different ontological orders? How can one distinguish the creative process of critically suturing a video essay from its manipulative reorganization, given that both employ the dadaist technique of montage similarly? Furthermore, what occurs to the experience of the analog artist/reader/critic in an age of digital transitions and recoding? Do analog human bodies offer sharper resistance and more decisive interventions than any networked interruption?

Goncharov relates the experience of the subject to the categories of time characterized by incompleteness, retroactively passing and returning, self-reflexive inward folding, and eventful outward refraction. Badiou's theory posits the subject and event as transcending situations, the status quo, and discursive orders. The event names and marks the void by structuring subject-points, which, according to Badiou, are the works themselves. In this sense, the video essays can be considered evental as they signify a rupture in the network of the ontologically familiar and possible. The work thus engages with interruption and failure, adhering to Badiou's imperative to persist in interruption as an attempt at the edge of impossible. In this perspective, the profound philosophical issue is connected to the relatively unexplored phenomenon of the video essay in this country, which operates entirely within a digital environment. Goncharov seeks to reconcile Manovich's visions of spatial narrative with the Badiou's ontological notion of the logic of worlds. In these Manovich-Badiou homologies, one might question whether the database as a paradigm and montage as manifestation still result in immanent recodings, while Badiou's notion of the event relies on an ontologically heterogeneous breakthrough. It seems productive to consider the notion of spatial narrative through the transmediality of ekphrasis, which Goncharov has addressed in one of his recent publications, "The Use of Technical Images in Annie Ernaux's Books". The experimental aspect of the work involves how the form of the video essay engages with the unrepresentable, thereby distancing, critiquing, and exposing its own mediality in digital contexts and contemporary blindspots. Goncharov effectively demonstrates how the

video essay manages to reveal what lies beyond the frame, unmask its own conventions and technological construction, and dismantle its editing techniques.

Stefan Goncharov's study is concerned with the fragile, the subject's encounter with the impossible as a generative process, and the finitude of any attempt that engages in truth-producing procedures, as well as the retroactive insistence on fidelity to the subject-generating event, which inevitably leads to failure. The investigation technique, described as the decoding and editing of certain syntagmas and narratives, involves a reworking and remodeling of experience. This technique serves as the driving force of the dissertation, which illustrates that future cannot be achieved without revisiting the glitches and slippages of the subject. Advancement is contingent upon acknowledging and confronting its own failures and misrecognitions. Thus, the essay, defined as an "event of (in)human experience", and the video essay as a digital articulation demonstrate that it is possible to preserve the impossible as such only through the unrepresentable attempts as events.

These considerations provide me with sufficient grounds to confidently propose to the esteemed academic jury that the degree of PhD in the field 2.1. Philology (Theory of Literature) to Stefan Vassilev Praskov (Goncharov).

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