

**Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'**  
**Faculty of Slavic Studies**  
**Department of Literary Theory**



**Stefan Vasilev Goncharov (Praskov)**

**The Video Essay and the Idea of Criticism in the Digital Age:  
Attempts and Events**

Summary of a PhD Thesis in the field of 2.1 Philology

Academic Supervisor:  
Prof. Todor Hristov, PhD

Sofia, 2024

The thesis was discussed and defended at a meeting of the Department of Literary Theory in the Faculty of Slavic Studies of Sofia University on 28.06.2024.

Prof. Dr. Stoyan Stavru, Institute for Literature – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Kovachev, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kamelia Spasova, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Boyan Manchev, New Bulgarian University

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ina Dimitrova, Paisii Hilendarski University

“The Video Essay and the Idea of Criticism in the Digital Age: Attempts and Events” is a PhD thesis of 316 standard pages and consists of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. The bibliography contains 196 titles in Bulgarian, English, French, and German. The multimedia section contains titles of films, videos, and other forms of media. The appendices include 32 figures and images.

## Table of contents

1.	Introduction	/	5
2.	Introduction to the Field of the Essay		
2.1.	A Definition of the Essay as a(n) (Im)possibility	/	14
2.1.1.	On the (In)Human Premises of the Dissertation	/	22
2.2.	A Preliminary Attempt	/	27
2.3.	Narrowing the Field or "On an Unwritten Dissertation"	/	31
2.4.	Towards the Audiovisual Essay and Beyond	/	39
2.5.	Audiovisual Science? On the Video Essay and Academia	/	44
2.6.	The Audiovisual Essay as an Aesthetic Object	/	49
2.6.1.	Enclaves and Theories of 'High' Essay Writing	/	54
2.6.2.	A Theoretical Overview	/	58
2.6.3.	Regarding Some of the Critiques of Popular Forms of Essay Writing		/ 70
3.	The Network Essay – (Pre)History and Attempts		
3.1.	Retroactive Canons	/	85
3.1.1.	Another Example and Two Categories: An Essay on Edward Muybridge	/	95
3.2.	Post-War Essayism: The Heritage of Europe and the Attempt	/	102
3.3.	The Future of Cinema	/	113
3.4.	Pedagogical Excursus: The Essayistic Community	/	119
3.4.1.	Passing on the Experience of the Attempt	/	128
3.5.	From Film to Video: Notes on the Context	/	144
3.5.1.	Video Art: Between Aesthetic Experiments and (Im)possible Attempts	/	148
3.5.2.	An Overview of Some Key Works		/ 159
4.	Digitality and Networkedness: Explication of the Theoretical Framework		
4.1.	The Language of New Media: Sampling and Presentation, Measure and Representation	/	177
4.2.	The Common Measure of the Digital: Modularity and Discernibility/		191
4.3.	Programming and Automation: Defamiliarization and Familiarization	/	193
4.4.	Variability and Care	/	199
4.5.	Suturing Digital Cinema	/	205
4.5.1.	On the Concept of Suture	/	206
4.5.2.	Desuturing Digital Cinema	/	226
4.6.	Cultural Transcoding	/	240
5.	Conclusion	/	261
	Bibliography	/	267
	Multimedia	/	279
	Appendices		/ 288

## First Chapter: Introduction

Building on the works of authors like Alain Badiou and Timothy Corrigan, this study is based on the idea that the essay is a subjective practice that unfolds as an intervention or self-refractive act within a given world. Or more precisely – it is an operation for working through what is available which in turn creates its subject in the form of an attempt, experiment, or judgment—an *essai*—within some 'universal' domain (such as art, science, politics, and/or love).<sup>1</sup> The text acknowledges that there are other definitions of the essay, but it utilizes this particular one for two reasons. Firstly, the dissertation takes up the position that only an 'operational' approach to essay writing can account for all its diverse manifestations (across various media and historical contexts). Secondly, this framework, which presents the essay as an intra-worldly intervention, allows us to treat the attempt as an ontological problem (and one of the main theses of this dissertation is that it indeed is such a problem). Thus, this work poses and strives to answer the following central question: "What does it mean to make attempts and consequently fail (in today's world)?"

To address and analyze such a case in the context of our contemporary, digitally-networked situation, the text relies primarily on the work of the French philosopher Alain Badiou. There are generally three reasons why the essay is treated from the perspective of his ontological theories in particular. Firstly, Badiou's paradigm allows a 'pragmatic' exploration of experience as a 'sheaf of operations' that strives to articulate some subjective truth, working through what is available in a situation by enacting interventions. This thesis is illustrated through the use of concepts from the first two volumes of *Being and Event* – Badiou's seminal work, in which he attempts to build and formalize a comprehensive, operational ontology of the multiple and the one, of the state of the situation, of truth as an event, of the world as appearance, and of the subject as a body that incorporated something (im)possible from the standpoint of the present. Secondly, it can be noted that the ontology of digital media (and in turn of the attempts it mediates) could be explored through Badiou's own ontology, as both are mathematically conditioned by the possibilities of the discernable (the discrete). And thirdly, Badiou is one of the last notable French philosophers of cinema (the other being Jacques Rancière). We can note

---

<sup>1</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing), 77

the little-known fact that he has been writing film criticism since 1950, and in 1993 he founded the magazine *L'art du cinéma* together with film critic/director Denis Lévy.

Although Badiou's philosophical paradigm forms the foundation of this dissertation, many of the ideas in the text are developed further with the help of psychoanalytic and media-theoretical concepts. Regarding the former, the presence of Jacques Lacan is most noticeable. The reason is that on the one hand, there are numerous points of contact between him and the Badiou (who reworks his ideas in his own way), and on the other hand – a significant portion of film theory employs his concepts. For this reason, names such as Jean-Pierre Oudart, Jean-Louis Baudry, Laura Mulvey, and others who work with Lacanian concepts in one way or another also appear. In the field of media theory, the text relies primarily on Lev Manovich, as his ideas about the structure and characteristics of the digital can be functionally reconciled with Badiou's ideas about the structure of the ontological (about presentation and representation). At the same time, names such as Yvonne Spielmann and Gene Youngblood, who specialize in video, also come up in the text when the transition from analog to digital media is being contextualized.

On the other hand, in order to sketch out the history (of the theory) of audiovisual essay writing, the dissertation works with numerous film scholars such as Laurent Le Forestier and Thomas Elsaesser, as well as with authors specializing specifically in the field of the film essay, such as Timothy Corrigan, Nora M. Alter, Rick Warner, and others. Their work will allow the ontological question of cinematic experience to be placed in the context of the various manifestations and metamorphoses that it has undergone since the invention of the seventh art up till the present day. Furthermore, such an approach could help the reader gain at least some understanding of the history (of the theoretical stakes) of audiovisual essay writing, as this is a field that has not yet been explored academically in Bulgaria.

Due to the sheer scope and polymorphic nature of the topic, we could broadly state that the goal of the dissertation is to explore the essay as an (un)resolvable ontological problem, while also summarizing all the discoveries, questions, and answers that this interpretative framework will allow us to formulate in the course of this work. In this sense, the dissertation has a somewhat essayistic-experimental character, insofar as it takes a position and attempts to trace its consequences and conclusions to the extent it is able to. As it becomes clear, such an approach on the one hand fully corresponds to the research strategies in the academic field of audiovisual essay writing, and on the other – to Badiou's existential-axiomatic philosophy of

choice and fidelity. At the same time, the text has at least one more specific goal, namely – to demonstrate that the essayistic could be thought of as a sheaf of operations. In this particular case, it is considered as a collection of three procedures, but the dissertation does not exclude the possibility that there may be others that were not noticed in the process of working on the topic. The operations treated as constituting the attempt are criticism, curatorship, and pedagogy, and the text attempts to illustrate how they work with the help of specific audiovisual essays.

## **Second chapter: Introduction to the Field of the Essay**

The dissertation is divided into three thematic segments. The present segment serves as an extensive introduction to the world of the essay, marking some of the conceptual premises of the dissertation. The chapter begins with a section (2.1.), which offers a brief overview of some of the most important attempts to define the 'essay' itself. The goal is to illustrate the idea that essay writing can (not) be unequivocally defined. The essay is always a middle or a gap between at least two other categories – the 'middle' between prose and poetry (Mark Benze),<sup>2</sup> fact and fiction (Nora B. Alter),<sup>3</sup> private and public (Timothy Corrigan),<sup>4</sup> drama and the epic (G. K. Chesterton),<sup>5</sup> and others. The overview of these ideas is framed by an examination of the etymological connotations of the word *essai*. The word comes from the Latin noun *exagium* (weighing, balance), itself derived from the verb *exigo*, which can mean to throw out, demand, measure, weigh, determine, establish, examine, test, endure, and more. In most cases, theorists examining essay writing build their ideas upon the primary meanings of *essai* which means that they think of essay writing as an attempt or experiment. One exception is highlighted in Jean Starobinski's work, who turns to the etymological connection of *essai* with *examen* (through *exigo*) – a word that can also mean 'swarm.'<sup>6</sup> Through this meaning, he concludes that “the essay

---

<sup>2</sup> Max Benze, “On the Essay and its Prose” in *Essays on the Essay Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 52

<sup>3</sup> Nora M. Alter, *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 22

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 198

<sup>5</sup> G.K. Chesterton, “The Essay” in *Essayists on the essay: Montaigne to our time* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 57-60

<sup>6</sup> Jean Starobinski, From “Can One Define the Essay?” in *Essayists on the essay* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 110-111

might as well be the demanding weighing, the thoughtful examination, but also the verbal swarm”

Putting exceptions aside, the section mainly examines two essays on the subject – *The Essay and Its Prose* by Max Bense and *The Essay as Form* by Theodor Adorno. The first defines the essay as a type of “ars combinatoria.” For Bense, in essay writing, “pure knowledge” gives way to “imagination,” which recombines and transforms the conditions determining the object of a given attempt. The goal is “less the revelation of the object’s definition”, but to understand something about the “sum of factors” that determine its existence and its different possibilities.<sup>7</sup> Bense also points out that “the essay is the form of the critical category of our mind per se” – an “existential category” that has 'exteriorized' itself in the field of literature under the name of the essay.<sup>8</sup>

In Adorno's view, the essay is examined through the codes of negative dialectics – as a “hybrid,” “inconsistent,” and “fragmentary” form that asystematically and “critically” addresses a (cultural) object, confronting it with its own illusory/ideological foundations.<sup>9</sup> For him, the essay exhibits the “emancipation from the compulsion of identity”<sup>10</sup> (thus, its 'genre' cannot be pinpointed), and the “formal law” that it follows can be defined only as the law of “heresy.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it continuously (critically) resists any totalizing frameworks.

Following Adorno and Bense, the ideas of numerous other authors on the subject are given. Among them are Michel de Montaigne’s, György Lukács’, American essayist Phillip Lopates, writer William Carlos Williams’, Mexican essayist Gabriel Zaid’s, literary scholar Robert Lane’s, and others’ definitions of the essay. Reda Bensmaïa stands out, because in his book on the essayistic writing of Roland Barthes, he defines the essay as 1) “a tactic without strategy... fundamentally opposed to the philosophical system”<sup>12</sup> and 2) “the moment of writing before the genre, before genericness – or as the matrix of all generic possibilities”<sup>13</sup> From this perspective, the attempt does not exist before it is written (or performatively executed), because

---

<sup>7</sup> Max Bense, “On the Essay and its Prose”, 57

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 55

<sup>9</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “The Essay as Form” in *Essays on the essay film* ed. by Nora M. Alter, Timothy Corrigan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 60-81

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 74

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 81

<sup>12</sup> Réda Bensmaïa, *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1987), 54

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 92

it is virtual – woven from potentialities (whether genre-related or otherwise), waiting to be actualized in some way.

At the end of the section, the most crucial overlapping propositions in the field of essay writing are synthesized as follows: 1) the essay does not exist except in the act of writing/experimentation, 2) the 'subject of the attempt' (the essayist) plays a key role because his "I" is at least one of the essay's objects of investigation, 3) essay writing is asystematic and sets itself against any ideologically/illusory truth, and 4) because of that, essays are critical.

After this theoretical overview of the essay, the text continues with a brief section (2.1.1.) where some of Badiou's ideas are used to talk about (in)human experience. The dissertation defends the idea that it is possible to speak of 'human experience' as a whole, but only if its (in)human premises and the (im)possibility of its universality are first (axiomatically) accepted. In other words, this section states that there may (or may not) be such a thing as (in)human experience and that this (existential) thing 'exteriorizes' itself in various techno-logical forms through time. The reason for developing such a mundane premise (of the type 'man exists in some way') is the fact that for the past 50-60 years, western thought has increasingly problematized its so-called anthropocentrism, as well as the status of the human as a whole. From this perspective, the dissertation argues that the use of 'man' as a category needs to be qualified and applied self-reflexively, at least in the present context, so as to 1) account for the historical situation in which the western humanities find themselves and 2) maintain the productive tension between the intuitive (universal) value of man and his supposed (abstract/theoretical) inconsistency. The text advocates for the idea that the conflict between these two incommensurable perspectives is fruitful precisely because it paradoxically challenges (and forces) thought to repeatedly attempt to make bold hypotheses, maintaining the horizon of the human open – not as a utopian promise for the future but as an experimental *modus operandi* in the present.

In this line of thought, it is emphasized that Badiou attempts to rehabilitate, 'restore,' or even "resurrect"<sup>14</sup> the human through "a relationship with what exceeds our possibilities – with what, as an idea, exists beyond the natural needs of the human animal."<sup>15</sup> This relationship with the 'beyond as eidos' is realized in 'our most crucial experiences' – those accumulated in our

---

<sup>14</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 49

<sup>15</sup> Alain Badiou, *Philosophy For Militants* (London: Verso, 2016) ch. 2



encounter with (and work for) love, art, science, or politics. These are the four so-called “truth procedures” to which humans have access according to Badiou's philosophy. Only through 'empathetic' participation in these procedures can a person become a “subject” (of truth), “exceed the limits of our vital and social determinations”<sup>16</sup> and “reconcile” with the 'most extreme' dimension of the human, namely the in-human – that extreme “element” which can be both “obscure/violent” and “luminous/peaceful.” For Badiou, this is the only way to be “immortal” and thus (in)human, as “truths are infinite”<sup>17</sup> events whose “consequences”<sup>18</sup> the “faithful subject”<sup>19</sup> (participant in the procedure) continually “deduces”, giving them actual content and substance (a body).<sup>20</sup>

Following this, there's a brief essayistic section (2.2.) in which the text presents the 'truth' towards which the essay strives as something half-said. The dissertation achieves this by reworking a notable quote by Aldous Huxley about essay writing through the perspectives of both Badiou and Lacan. The quote reads: “The essay is a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything.”<sup>21</sup> This very general proposition is interpreted through the hypothesis that the essay asymptotically leans towards wholly expressing everything about its object of interest, settling in the end for an inevitable 'almost,' because, as Badiou endeavors to show in his work, 'the whole' or rather “the one is not” [l'un n'est pas].<sup>22</sup> Behind such a statement lies not only the late Lacan's thinking on the so-called logic of the “not-all” [pas-tout],<sup>23</sup> but also a significant number of set theoretical arguments and a particular reading of “Russell's paradox.”<sup>24</sup> Based on this complex thesis, the French analyst concludes that “truth” can only be “half-said” [mi-dire],<sup>25</sup> and Badiou develops an entire philosophy of 'exclusion' – of

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 512

<sup>18</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and event* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 100

<sup>19</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 50-54

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 455-459

<sup>21</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Collected Essays* (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), 2

<sup>22</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and event* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 21-30

<sup>23</sup> For how Badiou interprets Lacan's two logics (of the One and of the not-all): See. Alain Badiou, *Lacan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 55-56

<sup>24</sup> Badiou interprets Russell's paradox as formal proof that being (understood as pure multiplicity or abyss) always exceeds the capacity of language to represent it. See. Ibid., 46-47. For a concise version of how Badiou uses Russell's paradox to prove that "the Whole has no being" [le Tout n'a pas d'être], see. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing), 109-111

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 92

'the excluded' from the one (or, to be entirely precise, of that which is subtracted from its count).<sup>26</sup>

From this interpretative perspective, the essay can say “almost everything” because it 'attempts' to formulate some truth about one object or another. It experiments with the (im)possibility of expressing 'extra-ordinary' things about any subject that has awakened the desire of the 'attempting subject,' regardless of how abstract or concrete, banal or exotic it may be. However, here we encounter the edge of the other “almost,” which defines the right of the essay to speak on any matter and about “everything.” From a Lacanian perspective we can say that the object that essay writing (or any means of expression) cannot name is the enigmatic object-cause of desire. This is the absence or “void” [le vide],<sup>27</sup> around which the (being of the) subject is structured, along with their (unconscious) fantasies, urges, and aspirations. Since this elusive object represents an absence, it can never be fully captured, signified, or represented, because, like Badiou's one, it's more accurate to say it doesn't exist. According to Lacan, this constitutive lack lies behind desire,<sup>28</sup> where it provides “support,”<sup>29</sup> constantly persisting in its elusiveness,<sup>30</sup> never being where the subject expects to find it.

From there, the dissertation continues with a highly concise historical overview of (some of) the most important moments in the development of essay-writing (2.3.). Firstly, Montaigne is highlighted, because with him the “name”, marking the event of the attempt (essai) as a skeptical (Que şay-je),<sup>31</sup> appears as a self-reflexive exercise with claims to authenticity and self-portrait-like accuracy: “...I want to be seen in my simple, natural, and ordinary form – unforced and artless; because I am painting myself... reader, the subject of my book is myself.”<sup>32</sup> Following this, the connection between Bacon's attempts and his experimental-empirical notions of the scientific method is noted. In connection with him the text also mentions that authors like José

---

<sup>26</sup> Badiou speaks of this as that dimension of being in which being is radically "subtracted" from itself [la dimension radicalement soustractive de l'être]. Alain Badiou, *Being and event*, 10

<sup>27</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso Books, 1989), 178

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 101

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 175

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 252

<sup>31</sup> “What do I know?” It is assumed that this is, in a certain sense, Montaigne's motto. The essayist even commissioned a large coin, which featured his coat of arms along with the necklace of the Order of Saint Michael on one side, and the famous rhetorical question on the other. While still working as a judge, before retiring to dedicate himself to writing essays, the motto on the coin was different, though it was still skeptical: ΕΠΕΧΩ (I withhold). See. Philippe Desan, *Montaigne: A life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 248

<sup>32</sup> Мишел дьо Монтен, *Опиту: Книга първа* (София: Наука и изкуство, 1979), 49

Ortega y Gasset have stated that “the essay is science, minus the explicit proof,”<sup>33</sup> or like Bense – that the experiment [Versuch] is an “existential category,” which in the essay “metaphorically and methodologically” turns into a “literary form.”<sup>34</sup> It is also noted that shortly after the appearance of Bacon's essays in 1597, another essayistic subgenre flourished briefly in England, which, in the context of the 17th century, is more often associated with Jean de La Bruyère's *Characters* (1664) than with a series of almost entirely forgotten british author like John Stephens<sup>35</sup> or Nicholas Breton,<sup>36</sup> who wrote their collections of characters decades before the frenchman, while also defining them as “essays.”<sup>37</sup>

The text also notes the implicit connection between the technological development of media and the essay, which seems to gain increasing popularity as a form or genre with each subsequent revolution in the field of telecommunications (thought of in the broadest sense as tools for mediating information). Here, one should mention not only the photographic but also filmic and videographic essays. At the same time, it could be noted that with the development of printing technology (and its reduced costs), the 'journalistic essay' became a successful genre as early as the 17th century, when newspapers and publications appeared in Europe that we could argue (following Habermas) played a key role in forming the public sphere of the old continent. The most important names in this regard are perhaps Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, whose essays for *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* represent a pinnacle in the genre, although it was reached in the beginning of the 18th century.

Moving towards the Age of Enlightenment, the text notes that a more comprehensive study of the history of essayism could examine the significance of essayism for authors like Voltaire, Diderot, and Condillac, investigate whether there is a connection between Rousseau's 'confessional experiments' and the essay (or confessions in general, like Augustine's or De Quincey's), and not least – explore the relevance of Kant's *What is Enlightenment?*, which is practically also a (journalistic) essay. Following this, Goethe could be considered a transitional figure in the history of the genre (between the 18th and 19th centuries), primarily due to the

---

<sup>33</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 40

<sup>34</sup> Max Bense, “On the Essay and its Prose”, 58

<sup>35</sup> “Satyrical Essayes Characters and Others, 1615

<sup>36</sup> *Characters Upon Essaies Morall, and Divine, 1625*

<sup>37</sup> For an article that synthesizes the main titles and features of english character books, see. Claire Labarbe, “Composed, Altered and Transformed: The Other Self in Seventeenth-Century English Character-Books”, *XVII – XVIII: Crime and Criminals* 76 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.4000/1718.1592>

excellent book by literary scholar Peter Burgard, *Idioms of Uncertainty*, in which he thoroughly examines the significance, style, and peculiarities of the German's "subversive" essay writing, retroactively recognizing in him an event that reveals the essay as "a deconstruction of [any] systematic discourse" and consequently as a "deconstruction" of the concept of "genre" itself.<sup>38</sup>

From the 19th century onwards, the 'literary situation' in Europe begins to be increasingly "saturated" [satur  ]<sup>39</sup> with essays (it is hard to find an author from this period who has not written at least one essay). The text notes that this circumstance would make it difficult to analyze this century in detail, although a more comprehensive study would inevitably mention some key romantics like Shelley (with his *A Defence of Poetry*), or William Hazlitt (with his subjective critical style), or Charles Lamb (with his fictitious text and self-mystifications in *Essays of Elia*). From there, the text states that a study of the topic could also look beyond the Atlantic, where the american transcendentalists relied on the 'essay' both as a genre and as an existential practice which they employed in order to describe, convey and give life to their ideas. For that same century, we might also consider whether the essay could encompass 'antiphilosophers' like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, who were asystematic thinkers. Alternatively, as we approach the fin de si  cle, it might be better to focus on authors who clearly operated within the boundaries of the genre, such as Baudelaire (a favorite of Benjamin) and similar writers like Oscar Wilde. This approach could help us pose the question: "What is the decadent experience of the attempt?"

With the advent of the 20th century, the essay began to acquire a 'paraliterary' status due to the aforementioned saturation and its transformation into a pedagogical, school-academic genre, particularly in the English-speaking world. It's understandable then why, in 1965, the poet and literary critic Michael Hamburger wrote that "since the time of Woolf and Chesterton, the

---

<sup>38</sup> Peter J. Burgard, *Idioms of uncertainty* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 111

<sup>39</sup> This is a concept that Badiou has taken from the French anthropologist Sylvain Lazarus. He has reworked it to describe the moment when the consequences that the procedures of truth bring about have already begun to "exhaust" themselves. The German philosopher Frank Ruda offers a brief description of how Badiou uses the term (since the frenchman does not provide one): "Saturation names a way of conceiving of the end of the consequences of a process of thought from a perspective that does not imply any exterior position of normative evaluation. It is the way to analyze from within the immanence of a procedure in its own terms, while not taking into account any other— external— causes...It precisely addresses the question of termination, and more specifically the question of the termination of "something" which, at least potentially, does not need to know an end: a generic truth procedure." See. Frank Ruda, *For Badiou: Idealism without Idealism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 123-124; For Lazarus' definition, See. Sylvain Lazarus, *Anthropology of the name* (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2015), 25

essay is a dead genre.” For Hamburger, however, “the essay has never been a form” (contrary to Adorno’s 1958 claim), but a style, allowing “the spirit of essayistic writing to assert itself beyond the genre” and continue “to move irresistibly forward, even passing through the corpse of the essay.” This separation of essayistic writing from the essay itself is realized in the novels of authors like Sebald (a good friend and neighbor of Hamburger in Suffolk), Chris Kraus, Annie Ernaux, Karl Ove Knausgaard, and the british ‘psychogeographers.’

In the next section (2.4.), I explore the new forms of essayism today, particularly the networked ones, and highlight some reasons why they deserve to be studied despite their mass appeal. Online essayism intensifies the effects, stakes, and issues of the 'attempt' as a means of expression because the virtual space is already oversaturated with audiovisual 'content.' This content, though extremely diverse, is clearly positioned under the broad 'umbrella' of the essay. Consequently, the essay increasingly becomes an impossible genre, implicitly deconstructing the idea of 'genre,' as Burgard argues.

The online spaces where this rapid growth of essayistic works is most noticeable include platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, and Facebook. This dissertation primarily focuses on YouTube, but other social networks like TikTok (and similar apps)<sup>40</sup> are also highlighted for their emphasis on "short-form content," i.e., videos or photo collages lasting between a few seconds and three minutes. Given that on other platforms a 'typical' audiovisual essay usually lasts between five minutes (YouTube channels like Nerdwriter1)<sup>41</sup> and one to two hours (ContraPoints),<sup>42</sup> it's not surprising that TikTok's constraints largely hinder the development of a stable essayistic culture. However, even in such challenging conditions, which exclude the possibility for more elaborate reflective attempts, some essays have developed a unique stylistic and thematic distinctiveness due to the requirement to be short, impactful, and informative. Notable examples include channels like *deepdivenewsletter*,<sup>43</sup> which specializes in meta-essayistic curatorial video compilations of audiovisual essays from YouTube, with which the account creator engages in

---

<sup>40</sup> For example, Instagram, which launched Instagram Reels in 2020. This section of the app is dedicated to the production, sharing, and consumption of short videos (up to 15 seconds). The platform introduced Reels (suggestively named 'film reels') to replicate the successful TikTok model (which, as of 2022, also supports videos up to 10 minutes long). Other social networks have integrated TikTok copies as well, such as YouTube Shorts (also from 2020).

<sup>41</sup> Nerdwriter1. Youtube channel. Accessed June 7, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/@Nerdwriter1>

<sup>42</sup> ContraPoints. Youtube channel. Accessed June 7, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/@ContraPoints>

<sup>43</sup> deepdivenewsletter. TikTok channel. Accessed June 7, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@deepdivenewsletter>

friendly or critical dialogue.

The dissertation notes that, as curious as they may be, these incarnations of 'the attempt' highlight the 'self-reflective atrophy' resulting from the oversaturation of essayistic works. It's somewhat absurd that specialized channels and forums<sup>44</sup> are now necessary to sift through meaningful, entertaining, and informative essays. At the same time, the need for selection, curation, and general 'care for online content' affects every aspect of the web. Today, the problem isn't a lack of information but an abundance of low-quality information that threatens to confuse, deceive, or simply waste the 'valuable' time of the average user in a capitalist sense. It's no coincidence, for example, that Spotify algorithmically curates individual and collective playlists of music tracks, while MUBI, a platform for non-commercial films, advertises that the cinema it offers is 'curated' (the app's name in the Google Play Store is MUBI: Curated Cinema). Additionally, it's crucial to consider how these companies 'care'<sup>45</sup> for the entertainment and art we consume. The dissertation holds that it's important to ask by what criteria and by whom/what our aesthetic tastes and trends are guided.

The section concludes by noting that users can probably find an essay on almost any topic they are interested in, whether it pertains to the humanities, the exact sciences, contemporary or historical subjects, everyday life, or politics. Since the essay is so 'omnivorous,' popular, and accessible, it becomes a 'quasi-institution' that entertains us while sorting, synthesizing, and processing vast amounts of information, making it more accessible to millions of people. In this sense, essays have become a significant part of our lives online, contributing to social processes that 'curate the present' by sifting meaningful from trivial information on the web.

The next section (2.5.) addresses the academic forms of audiovisual essay writing and some of their theoretical foundations. It highlights experimental publications like [in]Transition, which attempt to provide a more academic framework for the 'typical' audiovisual essay. The clips in this journal undergo a peer review process, and authors are required to cite sources

---

<sup>44</sup> Example of a list of 'notable' essay channels on Reddit, see. cabooseblueteam, "I've Compiled a List of Every Noteworthy YouTube/Vimeo Channel Similar 'Every Frame A Painting!'". *Reddit*. Accessed June 7. [https://www.reddit.com/r/videoessay/comments/480hbs/ive\\_compiled\\_a\\_list\\_of\\_every\\_noteworthy/](https://www.reddit.com/r/videoessay/comments/480hbs/ive_compiled_a_list_of_every_noteworthy/)

<sup>45</sup> The root of the word 'curation' comes from the Latin *cura* (care, concern, attention, guidance, etc.). In this dissertation, curation and care are used interchangeably to explore the theoretical potential of both concepts from the perspective of our contemporary audiovisual situation.

according to established scholarly styles within the video itself or in an accompanying note (though there is still no fixed citation standard).

Through a general overview of such academic publications, the text posits that, at least in the realm of audiovisual content, academia has lost part of its status as the leading agent in the production of knowledge, epistemological frameworks, and new ideas. This situation has arisen due to several key reasons: 1) publications like [in]Transition<sup>46</sup> are still considered niche, 2) there are no clear regulations and requirements for what constitutes a 'scholarly' video essay, and 3) many people in academia lack the necessary technological skills, and there is a shortage of workshops, courses, and often even the desire to learn.<sup>47</sup>

The thesis also outlines some of the ideas put forward by the scant number of supporters of academic video essay writing. It presents six arguments that, according to film scholar Ian Garwood, are most commonly used to determine and affirm the "academic value of videographic criticism."<sup>48</sup> These arguments are as follows: 1) video essays are "more illustrative" than a text, 2) they are also more suitable for analyzing audiovisual objects (the reader/viewer gains a better understanding of what the 'critic' is talking about), 3) "the scholarly value of video essays is enhanced by their association with (popular) internet culture," 4) they "utilize moving images and sound" in a way that "produces meaning in an affective register that written words cannot reach," 5) "meaning-making" in video essays implies more participation from the viewer, as it relies on "a-didactic argumentative strategies," 6) video essayistic criticism is more open to interpretation (as Garwood notes, this assertion is an attempt to turn "ambiguity" into an "academic virtue").

The next section (2.6.) examines how the cinematic essay is approached from an aesthetic-theoretical perspective and addresses the question of the 'creative' value of popular online incarnations of the essay. This section defines the boundaries of what is perhaps the most

---

<sup>46</sup> Other high-profile publications that accept or are entirely focused on audiovisual academic essays include 16:9 Filmtidskrift (Danish), Necsus (international, but published by the University of Amsterdam), Tecmerin. Journal Of Audiovisual Essays (Spanish), Hyperrhiz (international), Journal Of Embodied Research (which advertises itself as the first open peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the "dissemination of embodied knowledge through video"), and others.

<sup>47</sup> For a brief overview of these issues from the perspective of the renowned video essayist Kevin B. Lee, see. Kevin B. Lee, "New Audiovisual Vernaculars of Scholarship", *The Cine-Files* 15 (2020) <https://www.thecine-files.com/new-audiovisual-vernaculars-of-scholarship/>

<sup>48</sup> Ian Garwood, "Writing about the Scholarly Video Essay: Lessons from [In]Transition's Creator Statements", *The Cine-files* 15 (2020) <https://www.thecine-files.com/writing-about-the-scholarly-video-essay-lessons-from-intransitions-creator-statements/>

significant form of audiovisual essayism historically – the aesthetic form. As film scholar James Slaymaker notes, this form has always been "protean," as it "may incorporate elements typically associated with the documentary, the avant-garde and narrative cinema."<sup>49</sup> In other words, cinematic essayism is hybrid, omnivorous, and multifaceted – capable of (self-reflexively) transforming and 'transfiguring' like the mythical god Proteus. It is fair to say that this has played a key role in making the essay a popular means of expression, adaptable to any situation, theme, discourse, and medium. At the same time, while we may be living in the "golden age of the film essay"<sup>50</sup> (in Corrigan and Alter's terms), the essay's popular success also threatens its 'special' status in cinematic history – as an avant-garde form that deeply and provocatively explores the conditions of cinema, the conditionality of documentary fact, and the all-encompassing nature of fictions (personal fantasies and shared ideologies).

To point out why the essay paradoxically risks losing its 'precious' aesthetic qualities at the height of its popularity, some of its formal qualities are highlighted. Slaymaker, among others, identifies the defining characteristics of audiovisual essay writing as follows:

The audio-visual essay, in my theorisation, is a fluid, self-reflexive form which problematises the viewer's perception of the image as an authoritative document, instead calling attention to the mechanisms that produced the image, as well as the social, historical and political context in which the image is embedded. As such, cinematic essayists draw attention to the constructed nature of the cinematic text and, therefore, encourage the viewer to think critically about the validity of the artistic strategies they employ and the veracity of the observations they express.<sup>51</sup>

Based on the quote, several criteria for essayism are synthesized: dialogism, hybridity/protean nature, and self-reflexivity. It is noted that most online video essays fail to meet the last of these criteria—they do not reflect on their own conditions, techniques, and approaches, falling short of the aesthetic-theoretical ideal. This omission threatens to exclude popular forms of audiovisual essay writing from the broader discussion of the topic. However, the dissertation argues that the essay should also be evaluated based on its popular manifestations.

---

<sup>49</sup> James Slaymaker, "Enter the Memory': Interactivity, Authorship, and the Empowered Spectator in the Digital Audio-Visual Essays of Chris Marker", *Open Screens* 6, no. 1 (2023): <https://doi.org/10.16995/OS.8477>.

<sup>50</sup> Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan, "Introduction" in *Essays on the essay film*, 6

<sup>51</sup> James Slaymaker, "Enter the Memory'



The necessity of maintaining a perspective towards mass audiovisual experience is clarified in subsection (2.6.1.). It explains the mechanisms and criteria used by certain institutions and authors to divide contemporary essayism into 'high' and 'low' categories based on unclear and unfounded criteria. One way in which some essayistic works and practices are valorized at the expense of others is by establishing and maintaining special platforms associated with a (presumably) higher and more prestigious level of essayistic production. In this regard, the emergence of the Essay Film Festival at the University of London in 2015 is indicative, as such events, however exciting, implicitly make selections and set quality criteria for what constitutes an essay worthy of the big screen and a live audience. On the internet, a site like Vimeo has earned a reputation as a place where 'more serious' video essayists and artists publish their projects with non-commercial intent.

Aside from such 'creative oases,' there are institutional mechanisms that can highlight video essays on YouTube as 'more authoritative' and of higher quality. For instance, companies with curatorial functions like MUBI sponsor individual clips or specific youtubers.<sup>52</sup> Another mechanism is the practice of some renowned journals for operative criticism producing and publishing critical essays on their youtube channels, such as the magazine Little White Lies. Additionally, the British Film Institute's (BFI) annual list of the 'best essays of the year,' compiled since 2017 with the help of international academics, critics, online creators, and festival curators, is also noteworthy in this regard.<sup>53</sup>

Beyond everything else, academic research is the most significant contributor to conceptualizing (questionable) qualitative criteria and critical tools for analyzing the current essayistic situation. Therefore, in the next section (2.6.2.), a comprehensive overview of the academic literature dedicated to audiovisual essayism is provided. The text pays special attention to the contributions of several key monographs and anthologies in the field. Perhaps the first comprehensive study of the film essay was published in 2011 – Timothy Corrigan's "The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker."<sup>54</sup> This was followed by several key anthologies dedicated

---

<sup>52</sup> For example see. The cinema cartographer, "The Greatest Directors You Don't Know". Youtube video, 39:11. October 31, 2020.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9g94T\\_xNdAk&ab\\_channel=TheCinemaCartography](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9g94T_xNdAk&ab_channel=TheCinemaCartography)

<sup>53</sup> Queline Meadows, Irina Trocan, Will Webb. "The best video essays of 2023". BFI. December 19, 2023. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/polls/best-video-essays-2023>

<sup>54</sup> Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

to the 'genre' – "The Essay Film: Dialogue, Politics, Utopia"<sup>55</sup> (2016), "Essays on the Essay Film" (2017), "World Cinema and the Essay Film"<sup>56</sup> (2019), and "Beyond the Essay Film: Subjectivity, Textuality, Technology"<sup>57</sup> (2020). Meanwhile, there were two more attempts to formulate a comprehensive theory of the essay film – Laura Rascaroli's "How the Essay Film Thinks"<sup>58</sup> (2017) and Nora M. Alter's "The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction"<sup>59</sup> (2018). To this list we can add "Godard and the Essay Film: A Form That Thinks"<sup>60</sup> (2017) by Rick Warner, a work with a narrower scope as it focuses on the essayistic experiments in Jean-Luc Godard's filmography.

The dissertation focuses primarily on Corrigan's conditional taxonomy of audiovisual essays which includes:

1. The audiovisual portrait<sup>61</sup> – this type of film essay "offers the pathos and crisis of the self as a moving image, in which subjectivity falters and drifts unsteadily—and sometimes blindly—between expression and presentation". It depicts the gap between the different depictions of the I.<sup>62</sup>
2. The travelogue – which "in letters to home" and/or "conversations with strangers", "discovers another self" through the reflexive encounter with "new or old environments".<sup>63</sup> Such essays view the Self as a dynamic product of the environment.
3. The diary – this type represents a "record" of the experiences of the "scattered and reflexive subject" of the essay in their atomizing encounter with the "public sphere"

---

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Papazian and Caroline Eade, ed. *The Essay Film: Dialogue, Politics, Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016)

<sup>56</sup> Brenda Hollweg and Igor Krstić, ed. *World Cinema and the Essay film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019)

<sup>57</sup> Julia Vassilieva and Deane Williams, *Beyond the Essay Film: Subjectivity, Textuality and Technology* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020)

<sup>58</sup> Laura Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

<sup>59</sup> Nora M. Alter, *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018)

<sup>60</sup> Rick Warner, *Godard and the Essay Film: A Form That Thinks* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017)

<sup>61</sup> "The portrait essay film offers the pathos and crisis of the self as moving image, in which subjectivity falters and drifts unsteadily—and sometimes blindly—between expression and presentation, struggling to think the face of a self that wavers and fractures within the foreground of history, nature, and society." Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, 89

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 89

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 105

(where their experience unfolds). This experience "rethinking the self in [the context of] public life."<sup>64</sup>

4. The editorial – this type represents a subjective take on "news" and "current events" of the day, essentially serving as an "editorial intervention" in how these are thought of, understood, and experienced within the private and public sphere.<sup>65</sup> These essays challenge the subject's ability to intervene at the level of the new and the evental.
5. The self-reflexively refractive attempt – this type "reenacts art as open-ended criticism,"<sup>66</sup> reflecting on the aesthetic and discursive "possibilities and limitations"<sup>67</sup> of a given medium through the subject's encounter with an artistic object. As Corrigan notes, these experiences are "anti-aesthetic" because they critically question the foundations of any art, focusing on the "failures" and "unmaking" of the aesthetic object.<sup>68</sup>

In the final section of this chapter (2.6.3.), I address some of the criticisms directed at the 'networked essay' and the overall massification of essayism, focusing primarily on two essayistic texts on the subject: *The Essay Film: From Festival Favorite to Flexible Commodity* by Thomas Elsaesser and *The Essay as Conformism* by visual artist Hito Steyerl. According to Elsaesser, our virtual life on social networks resembles an essay—an attempt to constitute ourselves as subjects in the internet space, like river islands in the flow of information. Elsaesser believes that this essayistic construction of the self causes our fleeting subjectivity to be distributed and dispersed across the network of relationships in which our digital personas are entangled. He even introduces the concept of "distributed subjectivities"<sup>69</sup> to denote the presumably negative effect of these essayistically constructed avatars/selves. From his perspective, online essay writing embodies a harmful regime of atomization, self-exploitation, and loss of identity, self-determination, and freedom for the subject. One could summarize that, for him, the networked essay (as a form) is a type of commodity, whose content – that which enters into commercial exchange – is ourselves.

The dissertation, however, advances the argument that the subject in Montaigne's Essays

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 140

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 154

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 183

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 188

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 191

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 244-245

was just as distributed within a network of considerations, conventions, and conformist strategies as any online user who wants to present themselves in the best possible light not only to their close friends and family but also to potential supporters, fans, and/or future employers. Philippe Desan, perhaps the most thorough biographer of the father of the essay, even goes so far as to assert that the *Essays* (especially the first two volumes) functioned as a sort of CV, wherein the essayist had the opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge of “history and politics, while simultaneously distancing himself from the traditional image of the advisor or diplomat.”<sup>70</sup>

The aforementioned text by Hito Steyerl is also critically examined. In it, she poses the provocative question: “Has the essay become a dominant form of narrative in times of post-Fordist globalization?”<sup>71</sup> This question leads her into a polemical dialogue with Adorno's “The Essay as Form,” as she challenges the philosopher's positive assertion that “the innermost formal law of the essay is heresy.”<sup>72</sup> Steyerl argues that this perspective is a product of “the era of the factory, the assembly line, and their standards for [fixed] identity.”<sup>73</sup> For Steyerl, the historical context of the 1950s allowed Adorno to valorize the essay as a form that appears to “escape official ways of thinking” because it is “emancipated from the compulsions of identity.” However, in contemporary times, when it is not “identity [that] is coerced,” but the very declaration of “difference”<sup>74</sup> that is compelled, such a thesis can no longer be uncritically upheld. Steyerl argues that when “hybrid” subjects, “mobility, extreme flexibility, and dispersed regimes of attention” are emblems of the status quo, the nonconformist logic of the essay paradoxically becomes trapped in the self-reflexive, dynamic, and all-encompassing conformity of capitalism, which continuously incorporates every creative critique directed at it (or any of its manifestations).

In contrast to Elsaesser, whose stance on online essay writing is entirely negative, Steyerl endeavors to critically distinguish attempts that enable the contemplation of an (im)possible universalism from those that merely skim the ‘surface’ of contemporary issues, blindly reproducing the contradictions beneath. However, given the brevity of her article, Steyerl could

---

<sup>70</sup> Philippe Desan, *Montaigne: A life* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 274

<sup>71</sup> Hito Steyerl, “The Essay as Conformism” in *Essays on the essay film*, 282-283

<sup>72</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “The Essay as Form” in *Essays on the essay film*, 81

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 75

<sup>74</sup> Hito Steyerl, “The Essay as Conformism”, 266-277

not articulate a strategy for differentiating these conceptual counterparts. Consequently, her reflections remain at a somewhat rudimentary 'pharmacological' level—networked essays can be both a poison and a remedy for the intractable problems of the present.

The only aspect in the article that somewhat breaks away from this “both good and bad” logic is the concept of the “visual bond,” which Steyerl borrows from Soviet filmmaker, editor, and early film theorist Dziga Vertov. For her, “globe-girdling chains of production” of capitalism can be “be reconstructed (or deconstructed) in order to enable alternative, non-commercial forms of communication.” These would be the corresponding (audio)visual 'bonds' capable of articulating “shared images and sounds.” From this perspective, essay writing is tasked with “creating different links between people, images, and sounds” that represent diverse constellations of viewers, technologies, audiovisual materials, and subversive movements of thought and affect that could potentially undermine the status of images and sounds as mere commodities.<sup>75</sup>

### **Third Chapter: The Network Essay – (Pre)History and Attempts**

The second major thematic block examines some key works, theoretical propositions, and contextual peculiarities that have marked the history of audiovisual essayism. It primarily engages with the works of Corrigan and Alter, further developing, expanding, and reinterpreting some aspects of their historiographical and theoretical works on the topic of the film essay. To this end, the past (and present) of audiovisual essayism is roughly divided into three periods – the retroactive one (from the invention of cinema to the end of World War II), the classical one (from the late 1940s to the emergence of digital media), and the contemporary one, but this chapter focuses mainly on the first two.

Section (3.1.), with which this part of the dissertation begins, is dedicated to early forms of audiovisual essayism. It is called retroactive because (from a purely formal standpoint) it marks a retrospective, theoretical reconstruction and (re)interpretation of the early years of the seventh art from the perspective of essay writing (as at least until 1940 the concept of the film essay didn't exist). The section utilizes examples mainly from the works of Corrigan and Alter.

---

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 278

That is why, canonical directors such as Benjamin Christensen, Hans Richter, Sergei Eisenstein, and others are highlighted. At the same time some attention is also given to cinematic works that have not been considered in the light of essay writing until now, such as those by Jean Painlevé. For this reason, a subsection (3.1.1.) is included, in which the text tries to fit the early filmmaker Eadweard Muybridge into the 'conditional canon' of the film essay, proposing a general essayistic classification in which he would fall. The two main categories in this classification are derived from Corrigan's taxonomy and Badiou's ideas about philosophy, cinema, and the four procedures of truth. The first category in the classification is analogous to the category of "editorial interventions"<sup>76</sup> in Corrigan's taxonomy, while the second runs parallel to his concept of refractive attempts. 'Editorials' are described as 'attempts at truth', corresponding to one or more of Badiou's four (in)human procedures – art, science, politics, and love. The second type of attempts is divided into two subcategories: those that refract other attempts in a specific field (which are called 'theoretical') and those that self-reflexively question the conditions of the attempting itself, 'self-refracting' in the process (those are called 'philosophical').

In the next part (3.2.), the beginning of the classical period of audiovisual essayism is presented not only through films released immediately (or shortly) after the end of World War II but also through works that openly or indirectly address the trauma of the conflict, the Holocaust, and/or mass emigration. Films such as *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947) by Hans Richter, *Blood of the Beasts* (1949) by Georges Franju, *Night and Fog* (1956) by Alain Resnais, and others are examined. This section is key as it reveals the connection between the reality of trauma, the attempt to half-say the truth, and the memory of what happened, which audiovisual essayism begins to systematically work through, comprehend, and preserve. The main thesis of the dissertation in this part is that a significant portion of audiovisual essays after World War II can be read either as works creating memory (of remembering worlds) or as 'soteriological' attempts to surmount the (im)possibility of transforming the flow of events – attempts illuminated in a new way by the light that cinema projects onto the screen of history.

In the next section (3.3), the work addresses the 'utopian' views of the French film critic Alexandre Astruc, who believed that in the future everyone would "write" and express

---

<sup>76</sup> It is necessary to note that there are certain homologies between the concepts I employ in this framework and some of the theses formulated in *CHAOS (editorial manifesto)*. For example, the idea that editing is immanent, polemical (the manifesto emphasizes the word "against"), operational ("acting upon another action"), and associated with working through ("the question of working through is the question of becoming-a-work"). Link: <https://314etc.com/chaos/>

themselves with images (a stage that has, in a sense, already been reached). In particular, the dissertation analyzes two texts by the French critic that were of key importance for the development of audiovisual essayism as a popular theoretical/philosophical practice: *The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: The Camera-Stylo* and *The Future of Cinema* (both from 1948). Generally, they 1) pose anew the question of what are the properties and what is the scope of film language, 2) emphasize how the technological development of cinema will democratize the medium, 3) support the idea that philosophy should not only be thought of cinematically but also made cinematically, and 4) frame the radical assertion that the future of the seventh art is to become “privileged form, destined to replace all those that preceded it, and beyond which there will be no other, possible expression any time soon.”<sup>77</sup>

Through a close reading of these two texts, the dissertation also tries to defend the thesis that Astruc's articles set what will become the ambitions and goals of audiovisual essayism, especially when it comes to the self-reflexively philosophical possibilities of the medium. Some of the most memorable statements in the articles are that cinema will soon be able to “produce works equal in depth and meaning to the novels of Faulkner and Malraux and the essays of Sartre and Camus” and that “a modern Descartes would lock himself in a room with a 16mm camera and some film to write his philosophy of cinema, because his *Meditations on First Philosophy* today would be of such a nature that only cinema could express them satisfactorily”.<sup>78</sup> And although these statements are up for debate, they captured the imagination of an entire generation of filmmakers and thinkers, with the vector of their utopian force reaching its apogee in Deleuze's work, where cinema is thought from within its own possibilities and conditions. This allows Deleuze to treat the cinematic as a philosophical practice,<sup>79</sup> and directors – as the philosophers of a Bergsonian world in which physical matter and the representations of that matter are one and the same.<sup>80</sup>

The dissertation, however, suggests that the thinker who truly develops the implicit universalist pathos of Astruc's line of thought is Badiou, for whom the seventh art is “a

---

<sup>77</sup> Alexandre Astruc, “The Future of cinema” in *The Third Line*, 9. (2017):

<http://thirdrailquarterly.org/alexandre-astruc-the-future-of-cinema/>

<sup>78</sup> Alexandre Astruc, “The Birth Of A New Avant-garde: La Camera-stylo”, *New wave film*.

<https://www.newwavefilm.com/about/camera-stylo-astruc.shtml>

<sup>79</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, 209, 280

<sup>80</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 58

democratic emblem”.<sup>81</sup> For him, cinema is a “mass” and accessible aesthetic practice that represents, reveals, and rethinks the truths produced in other the arts. This makes cinema an “impure” mixture – a hybrid medium composed of other media, creative procedures, and even “non-art” – but this is also what links it to philosophy (thought of as a midwife of other procedures’ truths). And since in Badiou's paradigm, everyone is equal when thinking philosophically (provided that their arguments follow the rules of classical logic),<sup>82</sup> cinema turns out to be an egalitarian space where “ordinary opinions” intersect with “the work of thought”.<sup>83</sup> And while cinema is situated closer to 'philosophy' than to the arts, this does not mean that it has nothing in common with art. Since films 'remediate' foreign aesthetic truths with non-artistic (technological, capitalist, or other) means, they give viewers “the possibility of rising” i.e., of learning to distinguish, decode, and understand the diverse 'creative events' woven into the impure mixture that is cinema.<sup>84</sup> Only in this sense can we speak of a 'seventh art' and claim that it is a “mass art.” Thus, in the end for Badiou, cinema is eternally split in two – simultaneously a philosophy and a gateway to the other arts. Anyone can both think through it and let it “elevate” them or educate them in the pleasures of literature, music, painting, etc. From this perspective, Badiou affirms the universalizable aspects of Astruc's speculations and extends Deleuze's ethical-political move to think of cinema as philosophy, linking it to a democratic imperative. As he writes at the end of his article: “After the philosophy of cinema must come – is already coming – philosophy as cinema, which consequently has a chance of being a philosophy of the masses.”<sup>85</sup>

The next section (3.4.) builds upon Corrigan's comments on the significance that French ciné-clubs had for the emergence and development of audiovisual essay writing, specifically (or at least initially) in France after the war. In order to develop his argument, he primarily relies on Kelly Conway's analysis of ciné-clubs.

---

<sup>81</sup> Alain Badiou, “On Cinema As A Democratic Emblem” in *Cinema* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 238-239

<sup>82</sup> “...we must accept the existence of a universal logic as the formal condition of the axiom of the equality of intelligences. Metaphorically speaking, this is the ‘mathematical’ dimension of philosophy: there exists a freedom of address, but there is also the need for a strict rule for discussion.” See. Alain Badiou, *Philosophy for militants* (London: Verso, 2012), ch. 1; *Logic of Worlds*, 169, 183

<sup>83</sup> Alain Badiou, “On Cinema As A Democratic Emblem”, 211

<sup>84</sup> Alain Badiou, “On Cinema As A Democratic Emblem”, 238-239

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 240



The goal of the revived ciné-club movement was “to form spectators both fully aware and passionate who will continue to frequent commercial cinemas, more often, if possible, but with another regard and a refined sensibility, more lucid and more acute.” The ciné-club attempted to form spectators in very specific ways: through its diverse programming, through film education internships, and, above all, through the débat, the post-screening discussion... The goals of the post-war ciné-club, in other words, were myriad and ambitious: to reach out to viewers from a wide socio-economic spectrum, expose them to a range of “good” films from a variety of national traditions, genres, and auteurs, and teach them to formulate and express publicly their opinions about the film's narrative, style, and historical context... [All in all] the post-war ciné-club invested in the formation of an active, educated viewer.

This section introduces and outlines the pedagogical aspects of essay writing. It is longer, more heterogeneous, and more 'transtemporal' than the other ones, and can thus be read as a kind of excursus, which reveals the fact that an educated viewer, a literate community, and a succession of attempts are all necessary conditions for the existence and development of audiovisual essay writing. The section is divided into two parts – the first outlines the history, significance, and pedagogical goals of the ciné-clubs in France (up to the beginning of the New Wave), while the second (3.4.1.) takes on the topic of how the average viewer gets educated in a contemporary setting. To this end, some of today's institutional (and existential) mechanisms, which ensure the succession of audiovisual attempts are analyzed. For example, the dissertation examines critically the ideas and practices that underpin the program of one of the most renowned academic workshops for "videographic essay writing" in the world – the one at Middlebury College (USA, Vermont).

Other, more informal pedagogical forms of essayistic audiovisual succession are also examined. For example, Kevin B. Lee's desktop documentary films are highlighted. As the content of such essays is almost entirely taken from images and information available online, this relatively new genre is perhaps the most original manifestation of networked essay writing – or at least the one that most clearly reveals its peculiarities, characteristic features, and aesthetic-epistemological frameworks. This is due to the fact that desktop documentary films are built around our daily experience with the network and how we interact or interface with it – how we navigate the vast amounts of audiovisual data in an attempt to organize (into a coherent narrative), understand, and possibly change them. At the same time, this type of attempt can be thought of as one of the most pedagogical incarnations of essay writing, because its editing often reveals the very processes and conditions of its creation. The viewer is able to visually

comprehend a significant amount of the 'technical work' which goes into an essay – how one may find useful information online (how one may work with search engines and maps, for example) and how images on the screen are de-/re-edited in real time (sometimes in specific programs like *Adobe Premiere*).

After this 'pedagogical excursus,' the dissertation returns to the question of how audiovisual attempts have been developing and transforming from the post-World War II period to the present day. The relevant section (3.5.) addresses one of the most important events in the history of the cinematographic essay, namely – the popularization of the medium of video. Drawing on issues raised by authors like Alter and Michael Renov,<sup>86</sup> this part of the text attempts to identify where audiovisual essayism and video art diverge and intersect, examining essayistic works by numerous artists such as Richard Serra, Nancy Holt, Hermine Freed, Dan Graham, and Woody Vasulka. A common thread amongst most artists from this period is the enthusiasm with which they view the accessibility and permissiveness of this new medium, that seems to allow any 'user' to document and easily transmit what is happening around them, as well as to experiment performatively (in real time) and self-reflexively (with the analog signals that make up the videographic image). At the same time, the boom of accessible audiovisual material for reworking and remixing, following the spread of videotapes and home VCRs, allowed the 'videographer' to reproduce, share, and generally tinker with copies of all kinds of productions (these practices were facilitated by the existence of public and private video libraries). As Alter notes, “video was received as a democratic medium both by and for the general public”. “Finally, with video the now “possessive” spectator could watch, manipulate, and control viewing with features such as rewind, pause, fastforward, freeze, or still frame of images”.<sup>87</sup>

One of the main goals of the first part of this section (3.5.1.) is to draw a functional distinction between an 'aesthetic experiment' and an (im)possible attempt. With the help of Badiou, the text concludes that video art is a procedure that deals with “the sensible and the variance of its forms”<sup>88</sup> and the eventual production of new types of “perceptual intensity”. In contrast, essayistic cinema is marked by an unending desire for other types of (shareable) truths

---

<sup>86</sup> Michael Renov, “The Electronic Essay” in *Essays on the essay film*, 175

<sup>87</sup> Nora M. Alter, *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction*, 214

<sup>88</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 75

and events. This desire inevitably produces “impure mixtures”<sup>89</sup> of diverse materials in a situation – whether scientific, political, aesthetic, and/or romantic. That's while all the video art pieces defined in the dissertation as essayistic are those that buttress their formal aesthetic explorations with a desire to express an (im)possible truth about one or other general existential question that concerns the lacking essence of the (in)human. They achieve this not only because they use documentary footage, but because they subjectively 'place,' refract, and combine the materials they use in the form of memory and, hence, fiction.

The second subsection (3.5.2.) is primarily focused on providing examples of essayistic works from the period (many of which have not been previously commented on in terms of essay writing). For the purposes of analysis and ordering, a provisional distinction is made between video essays that polemically address mass media and those that are more prone to problematize and reflexively refract the essayist's self (while treating some external issue). Examples of the former include *Television Delivers People* (1973) by Richard Serra and Carlotta Schulman, *Martha Rosler Reads Vogue: Wishing, Dreaming, Winning, Spending* (1982), and *Local TV News Analysis* (1980) by Dara Birnbaum and Dan Graham, among others. The second groups is represented in the text by essayistic works such as *Art Herstory* (1974) by Hermine Freed, *Reflections on the Birth of Venus* (1976) by Ulrike Rosenbach, *Electronic Diary* (1984-96) by Lynn Hershman Leeson, and others.

It should also be noted that the section pays special attention to the female essay writers in video art (and cinema) from this period. The reason is that with the advent of the new medium in the 1960s and 1970s, more women than ever found themselves in a position to produce audiovisual content due to the relative accessibility of the new technology. As Alter<sup>90</sup> (and others)<sup>91</sup> note, the sudden appearance of video on the scene of the art world had an 'equalizing/egalitarian' effect, putting men and women on equal footing since anyone (who could afford a Portapak camera) suddenly had the opportunity to become an artist without going through the traditional (and more patriarchally coded) institutions and channels of the fine arts. As one of the pioneers of the genre, Shigeo Kubota, unequivocally states in a poem: “Video is

---

<sup>89</sup> Alain Badiou, “On Cinema As A Democratic Emblem” in *Cinema* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 238-239

<sup>90</sup> Nora M. Alter, *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction*, 224-225

<sup>91</sup> Yvonne Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 145-146

Vengeance of Vagina.”<sup>92</sup> Her *Self-Portrait* (1970-71) can be included in the list of early self-reflective attempts. The work (like many others after it) challenges and attacks the 'classical' (at that time) conventions and techniques of representing female subjects, by taking advantage of the new videographic technology and the ways it can distort, disfigure, and work through how the essay's subject is represented in a given world.

#### **Fourth Chapter: Digitality and Networkedness: Explication of the Theoretical Framework**

In the final chapter (4.), the theoretical-philosophical paradigm underpinning the dissertation is presented, along with examples of 'networked essays' from platforms like YouTube and Vimeo. To this end, key moments from the two volumes of *Being and Event* are summarized and an attempt is made to reconcile Badiou's framework with the one developed by Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media* (a book exploring how the digital is structured). In the first section (4.1), a conceptual parallel is drawn between two of Manovich's theoretical terms – sample and quantification<sup>93</sup> – and the French philosopher's concept of presentation and representation.

A sample denotes “a measurement made at a particular instant in space and time, according to a specified procedure” with the frequency of “sampling” providing the “resolution” of said measurement. Manovich gives the example of a grid of pixels. When something is photographed with a digital camera, each pixel in the image is a sample/measurement of something in the external world. The more pixels in the photograph, the higher its resolution (and the more information it contains). The dissertation translates Manovich's concept of sampling into Badiou's terminology with the notion of the "count-as-one" (*compte-pour-une*). This term implies that a multiplicity is presented in a situation which recognizes it as something distinct/discernible. To illustrate what this means, the dissertation gives one of Badiou's more comprehensible examples.

Let's imagine a family in which only one member is an illegal immigrant. Although he belongs [ $\in$ ] to a multiple (the family) that is

---

<sup>92</sup> Christopher Stephens, "Video Is Victory of Vagina: The Radical Art of Shigeo Kubota". *Artscape*. accessed May 6, 2024, [https://artscape.jp/artscape/eng/focus/2108\\_01.html](https://artscape.jp/artscape/eng/focus/2108_01.html)

<sup>93</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 49

presented and thus counted by (the representation of) the situation (the state), he himself is “un-presented”<sup>94</sup> in it [imprésenté dans la situation]. It is important to note that this would make his family (as a multiple) presented in the situation but not represented by its state [état de la situation]. The key point here is that in order for the immigrant to be recognized as a full-fledged citizen, some operation must be performed to count him as one. Conformism<sup>95</sup> would be to go through the regular channels (to apply for citizenship), while an event would be to change the law so that it recognizes/counts/presents what was previously unrepresentable in the given situation. Furthermore, if we paraphrase this example in Manovich's terms, we could say that when a situation (the state) counts-as-one a multiplicity, it samples it – 'registers' or mediates it according to its own 'measure.' In other words, we can imagine someone being an illegal immigrant, who then suddenly receives an ID card that presents him/her by 'measuring' his/her age, height, eye color, etc.

By developing Badiou's conceptual framework in this manner, the dissertation claims to foreground its media-theoretical significance, or more broadly, to treat it as a theory of mediation (presentation, representation, appearance, etc.) of what is (not). The text uses the formula “what is (not)” because the philosopher repeatedly emphasizes that since the one-is-not<sup>96</sup> [l'un n'est pas], that is – since it is the result/effect of some ontological operation – being always presents itself (somewhat paradoxically) as what it is not (as units, rather than as pure/indiscernible multiplicities). Therefore, it can be argued that for Badiou, the truth of being is never immediately given – it is an (un)imaginable void, which (in Lacanian terms) we only half-speak in various ways (artistic, scientific, political, romantic). For Badiou the most precise way of half-speaking is the 'strictly-formal' one, which exists under the name 'mathematics'. For him, this is “the science of being as being,” that is – the only true ontology.

If we turn to the second concept that Manovich uses to describe how different technologies mediate what is (not). The Russian theorist describes quantification as an operation in which samples/measurements are “assigned a numerical value drawn from a defined range”<sup>97</sup> or measure. He gives an example with an 8-bit black-and-white image where each pixel (sample)

---

<sup>94</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and event*, 174

<sup>95</sup> Badiou wouldn't use the word conformism but rather “reactionism” – a term that can be extrapolated in *Logics of Worlds* from his concept of the “reactive subject” [sujet réactif]. See. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 54-58

<sup>96</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and event*, 23-37

<sup>97</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 49-50

is assigned a specific value between 0 and 255 (these are the possible numbers that can be expressed with eight binary positions). In practice, for Manovich, what distinguishes the digital from other media technologies is precisely this type of quantification. However, this does not necessarily mean that there are no other techniques or that the concept cannot be used in a broader theoretical sense in order to differentiate, compare and analyze diverse media.

In general, what makes digital quantification special according to Manovich are two circumstances. Firstly, according to him, quantification 'measures' the samples sequentially, uniformly, and unambiguously, meaning it records the recordings, or counts what is counted, or presents the presented. In other words, it corresponds to Badiou's concepts of re-presentation and "forming-into-one" [mise-en-un]. As the philosopher notes, this concept is not "really distinct"<sup>98</sup> from counting-as-one – it is the same operation applied to a multiplicity that has already been counted as a unit. But why is this reduplication necessary? Since for Badiou everything that is, paradoxically, actually is not (as it presents itself to be), we always work with a "fictive being,"<sup>99</sup> which is a product of the count-as-one as an operation that structures the multiplicity as a unit. At the same time, even if this is the case, nothing guarantees that what is presented as a unit is indeed that same unit if the operation that made it possible is not also presented in it. Thus, it may turn out that presentation, thought only through the count-as-one, represents a weak fiction that risks collapsing and merging with the void of inconsistent multiplicities at any moment – like a wave that briefly surfaces only to break unto itself and merge once again with the ocean. From this perspective, for a unit to endure, a repetition and reaffirmation of the operation that initially produced the situation is necessary – a "metastructure"<sup>100</sup> or "law"<sup>101</sup> is needed to ensure that the structure of the situation (the presented multiplicity) remains the same. This is the function of the forming-into-one, which re-presents the multiplicity and, accordingly, re-presents all of its distinguishable parts.

Secondly, quantification is a precise measure – it has specific boundaries, a precise volume, and clearly defined values. Following Badiou, we could say that this is the law or the "encyclopedia of a situation" [encyclopédie d'une situation]. Formally, it is "a classification of the parts of the situation which are discerned by a property which can be formulated in the

---

<sup>98</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and event*, 91

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 90

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 290

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 90

language of the situation.”<sup>102</sup> Broadly speaking, it can be defined as the set of discernible multiples subject to a determinant derived from what is represented (counted-as-one) in a situation. In other words, it is a product of the state of the situation. For Badiou, it contains everything “veritable”<sup>103</sup> [véridique] in a given situation – everything that can be discerned, thought, and spoken of as factually true (corresponding to the status quo). Therefore, in the French philosopher's framework, the encyclopedia constitutes the “knowledge” [savoir] accessible in a given situation, while the event is that which “does not fall under any encyclopaedic determinant”<sup>104</sup> and, accordingly, is unknowable, indiscernible, and unclassifiable at the level of representation.

Following this ontological investigation of the digital through Badiou’s and Manovich’s theories, section (4.2.) discusses the digital’s “modularity.” The concept generally denotes the fact that one may carry out the same operations on any digital sample because every such sample has a common structure or measure (for Manovich, this is one of the fundamental characteristics of the digital). All subsequent sections are dedicated to the operational consequences of this fact, as well as to all the other so-called “principles of new media”: programming,<sup>105</sup> automation,<sup>106</sup> variability,<sup>107</sup> and cultural transcoding.<sup>108</sup> These concepts are treated as reproducible procedures, emblematic of the 'digital situation' and its state. Understood in this way, the dissertation demonstrates, with the help of concrete examples, how networked attempts polemically problematize each one of these principles. To the list four terms is also added Manovich’s concept of “digital cinema”, which he’s coined in order to comment on the fact that in the contemporary audiovisual situation, the distinction between cinematography and animation dissolves, as a large part of films today include (in imperceptible ways) computer-generated images without any reference to 'reality.'

Firstly (4.3.), the dissertation tackles programming and automation, through the idea that essayism has perhaps always had a critical attitude towards the 'mechanical repetitiveness' of the state. If we take the first concept, Manovich does not provide a precise definition of it, but it

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 506

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 331

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 329

<sup>105</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 49

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 56-57

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 63-64

becomes clear from his text that it refers to writing “software”<sup>109</sup> for managing/codifying the “behavior”<sup>110</sup> of certain samples, or in his words – “virtual sets”.<sup>111</sup> In this sense, we can broadly describe the programming as representing the presented in the form of executable instructions. An audiovisual essay that reveals the fictitiousness of programming would draw (for example) the viewer's attention to the contingency of a given software’s affordances

As for automation, it implies nothing more than that certain software procedures and behaviors can partially or fully start up and repeat by themselves. Manovich generally distinguishes three types of automation – of “media creation,”<sup>112</sup> of “modification” and of “access”. For the first type, the author gives an example with generative artificial intelligences<sup>113</sup> (which, in 2004 when the book was written, was still very far from becoming as popular and powerful as it is today with platforms like ChatGPT). The second type of automation practically denotes all of the options in a program that allow the user to automatically perform a complex/composite operation on a virtual object (this is how digital photo filters work on platforms like Instagram – with the click of a single button they perform multiple procedures on a given photograph). As for automated access, we can use search engines as an example. Google, of course, comes to mind instantly, but tools for automatically locating information are used by almost all websites, be they blogs or social networks, news sites, or offline applications.

In general, it can be argued that automation appears as a key motif in the history of audiovisual essay writing. For example, desktop documentary films (which are emblematic of contemporary digital experience) in a certain sense employ an estranging aesthetic that de-automates our relationship with the interfaces we work with on a day by day basis. At the same time, the text further develops the essayistic *Verfremdungseffekt* by asserting that when it comes to essay writing, it has an inverse side (and thus has a dual nature). It can be formulated as follows – from the perspective of the state, the attempt defamiliarizes the terms and determinants of the encyclopedia (for the audience), but from the standpoint of the event, it does the opposite – it 'familiarizes' the viewer with the constructedness/fictionality of being and thus it (pedagogically) de-monstrates the traumatic void from which everything originates.

---

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 65

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 178

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.



The next section (4.4.) focuses on the variability of digital objects, meaning – on the fact that they are not “fixed once and for all,” but can “exist in different, potentially infinite versions.”<sup>114</sup> As Manovich notes, with “old” media technologies, a “master” version of the respective media object was produced – this is, broadly speaking, the 'original' from which all subsequent copies derive. These copies are always of lower quality than the master, since information is always lost during reproduction. In contrast, according to the author, digital samples and objects often appear simultaneously in several different formats, making it difficult to distinguish which is the original one, while (at least in theory) each one of them can be copied without loss of information.

The issue of variability is presented from the perspective of several networked essays,<sup>115</sup> by also highlighting the fact that the more our memory of the recent past becomes digitized (and thus variable), the more care (and curatorial interventions) will be needed to ensure that this 'digital heritage' endures in time, unchanged by those institutions with the power to 'edit' and/or even delete it. For example, as the youtuber Aaron Marco shows, preserving media content is neither (technically speaking) easy nor cheap, so it is possible that some companies may not have the interest or the resources needed to function as digital archives, which can ensure that what is created today remains available for future generations (in the form we find it now). In such a case, if we do not have public or private physical copies (or at least the ability to download and own digital ones), then it is possible that one day a company might delete some large quantity of digital works that are no longer profitable. In fact, there's no need for speculation on this point – this has already happened. In 2023, the large gaming company Nintendo closed its digital store for games created for their Wii U and Nintendo 3DS consoles.<sup>116</sup> As a result, around a thousand exclusively digital titles are now unavailable for purchase, and the chance that they will disappear forever is not small, although some private individuals who may have already

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 56

<sup>115</sup> Aaron Marko, “A video essay about media preservation | All We Are Is What We Remember”. Youtube video, 26:45. February 16, 2024.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2baU5NYwol&ab\\_channel=AaronMarko](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2baU5NYwol&ab_channel=AaronMarko); The Couch Critic, “The Dark Reality of Streaming Services | Video Essay”. Youtube video, 10:14. March 10, 2024.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOMOhNvCmY&ab\\_channel=TheCouchCritic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOMOhNvCmY&ab_channel=TheCouchCritic); Ted Kutina, “The Importance of Real Things”. Youtube video, 17:35. May 2, 2024.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0DzXAx9qjI&ab\\_channel=TedKutina](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0DzXAx9qjI&ab_channel=TedKutina)

<sup>116</sup> Chris Scullion, “These Are The 1,000 Digital-only 3ds And Wii U Games Disappearing Next Week”. VideoGameChronicle.com. March 22, 2023. <https://www.videogameschronicle.com/features/analysis-digital-only-wii-u-3ds-games/>

downloaded them might attempt to preserve them<sup>117</sup> (but I doubt they will have much success). Since Nintendo's decision, this case has become a frequently cited instance by YouTube essayists, illustrating the danger of our media objects having only digital copies, managed solely by large corporations (the youtuber *Lextorias*, for example, uses this precedent in an attempt to justify piracy as a technique for preserving the recent past).<sup>118</sup>

After that, the dissertation analyzes the ties between animation and digital cinema through Badiou's concept of "suture." A long section, divided in two parts is dedicated to this particular goal. In the first part (4.5.1.), the concept of "suture" is contextualized so we can demonstrate what kind of ontological operation it entails, show what's its relationship to montage and generally explain what role it plays in psychoanalytic theories of cinema. The dissertation begins by noting that Lacan uses the term for the first time in his 11th seminar to designate the point where the registers of the symbolic and the imaginary are conjunction [jonction].<sup>119</sup> At the same time, the author who seems to have developed the concept (or at least the most widely known version of it) is Jacques-Alain Miller. He introduced his version of the concept in a paper presented during the 12th seminar in 1965. A year later, his presentation was published in the form of an article titled *Suture: Elements of the Logic of the Signifier*<sup>120</sup> in the journal *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, in which Badiou has also published articles in this period.

Apparently the philosopher was greatly influenced by Miller's work – in *Number and Numbers*,<sup>121</sup> he describes the article as "the first great Lacanian text not to be written by Lacan himself" (in this book Badiou basically contextualizes and further develops most of the mathematical arguments presented in *Being and Event*). At the same point in the book, Badiou summarizes Miller's article, revealing what is important to him in the text, namely the way Miller 'interprets' *The Foundations of Arithmetic* by Gottlob Frege and particularly the German logician's ideas about how all other numbers can be derived from zero (by using the argument

---

<sup>117</sup> As an example, we can mention the youtuber Jirad Khalil, who bought all the games from the store right before Nintendo closed it, with the explicit goal of preserving them. See. Jirad Khalil, "I bought EVERY Nintendo Wii U & 3DS game before the Nintendo eShop closes". Youtube video, 19:39. March 18, 2023. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujHUMG0Uovs&ab\\_channel=TheCompletionist](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujHUMG0Uovs&ab_channel=TheCompletionist)

<sup>118</sup> Lextorias, "Video Game Piracy Is Good, Actually". Youtube video, 33:34. February 14, 2024. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fu4pE46-zM&ab\\_channel=Lextorias](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fu4pE46-zM&ab_channel=Lextorias)

<sup>119</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts Of Psychoanalysis*, 118

<sup>120</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller, "Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)" in *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* 1 (1966): <http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/pdf/cpa1.3.miller.translation.pdf>

<sup>121</sup> Alain Badiou, *Number and Numbers* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 25

that zero is a form of being that is not identical to itself). What is important for Badiou is how Miller demonstrates that in Frege's purely logical chain of proofs, there is a point (the counting of the empty set as one), where “the function of the subject, unrecognized, is operative.”<sup>122</sup> (another key point for Badiou is that the article reveals that at its core, the signifier is a number or discernible unit). It is precisely at this point that suture occurs – nothing becomes something (a fictive/fantasmatic being) thanks to an operation in which, for Badiou (contra Miller), the subject only co-participates, (mis)recognizing [méconnaissance] the product of the operation/work (of which he was a part) as a unit (some presented multiplicity).

In a film studies context, the term is first used by the French critic Jean-Pierre Oudart who introduces it in his article for *Cahiers du Cinéma – Suture and Cinema*.<sup>123</sup> The text is directly influenced by Miller's work and broadly speaking analyzes the work of Robert Bresson, focusing particularly on *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (1962) and how the director utilized filmic space, perspective, and montage in a way that in a sense 'refuses to suture' and thus to subject the viewer to the fantasmatic image on the screen. In other words, Oudart comments on techniques that draw the audience's attention to the constructedness of the diegetic space of the film and which hinder their identification with the characters within it.

Practically speaking, Oudart's article on suture deals with the legacy of the Russian school of montage and their approach to "de-objectification,"<sup>124</sup> and the strand of continuity editing that was developed on the basis of their discoveries. In other words, the French film critic analyzes the operation through techniques that alternate, compose and suture shots and reverse shots together in 'suggestive' ways but it doesn't account for the 'fantasmatic potential' of other forms of de-objectification such as those developed by the French impressionists, which occur at the level of the frame itself. Oudart's premise is relatively simple – every film is “articulated” based on a “absent field” [le champ absent] or an “Absent one” [L’Absent], which the viewer represses thanks to the imaginary identifications which the shot/reverse-shot schema invites.

The dissertation proposes an expanded understanding of suture and montage, that takes into account the spectator as an active participant in the cinematographic situation. This expanded notion of suture covers all cases where a multiplicity presented-as-one can be divided

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>123</sup> Jean-Pierre Oudart, “Cinema and Suture” in *Screen 18* (Winter, 1978): [https://www.lacan.com/symptom8\\_articles/oudart8.html](https://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/oudart8.html)

<sup>124</sup> Laurent Le Forestier, “Montage” in *Montage, Découpage, Mise en scène: Essays on Film Form* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 184

into two in a way that offers a working alternative to a given situation and its state (as opposed to offering a way of destroying the situation altogether). The text also points out that as media technologies develop, they invent new mechanisms for suturing – for the sequential representation, distribution, and arrangement of gaps and lacks (of different presented multiplicities and their corresponding voids). It is also stated that there are many diverse types of sutures and voids at the level of a given situations arrangement. For example there are gaps: between the audience's position and that of the screen (topological suture); between the viewer's body and that of the characters (affective); between fictional and documentary elements (existential); and countless others. All these are boundaries which the state of the audiovisual situation regulates as unobtrusively as possible because it assumes that what lies beyond them is the (un)presented. Whether there is something truly traumatic and/or truthful in these voids, however, can only be discovered and decided by an attempt.

In the second part of the section (4.5.2.), the text returns to the question of digital cinema, having already established a toolkit with which it can be productively analyzed. Here the dissertation here focuses on examples of networked essays that 'desuture' various aspects of today's cinematographic situation for educational purposes. The focus is on how we can read/desuture computer-generated images, videos, and films that hide their 'graphic' and/or 'simulated' nature behind a photorealistic aesthetic. The text comments on the premise (put forth by some theoreticians like Manovich) that such images are increasingly losing their indexical relationship with reality. The dissertation attempts to show why this isn't a valid form of argumentation in the context of Badiou's work. The text suggests that the ability of the average viewer to distinguish between photographic and computer-generated representations is a matter of 'general media literacy'.

In the final section (4.6.), the dissertation addresses what Manovich calls the “cultural transcoding” of samples in the “database,” while refracting these concepts through Badiou's work in *Logics of Worlds*. The text aims to show how what the russian theorist calls a “decoding of the world”<sup>125</sup> corresponds to the french philosopher's notion of an “investigation” [enquête].<sup>126</sup> The concept is presented as a progressive reflection on (or deciphering of) the ways in which the terms in the encyclopedia of a situation appear (are transcoded) in a specific world. To this end,

---

<sup>125</sup> Lev Manovich, *Language of New Media*, 184

<sup>126</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and event*, 506

an attempt is made to draw out the homologies between Manovich's concepts of the “database” and a “spatial narrative” (or “interface”) and Badiou's concepts of the “encyclopedia of the situation” and a “world” (or network). Based on these theoretical discussions, a conclusion is reached that today's attempts don't alter the computer's database directly, but through the world of the network as a topos, composed of countless sheaves (envelopes) that appear to the user in the form of various interfaces, whose possibilities paradoxically (but only potentially) allow the subject of the attempt to achieve the (im)possible – to influence indirectly, with his/her creations and works, the very foundation of our contemporary life (or at least that part of it defined by our digital environment).

The dissertation maintains that the subject of the attempt achieves this in the form of a triadic operation: 1) it polemically de-sutures a situation to expose the contingency of its world and the choices, traces, and fictions from which it is built; 2) it curatorially chooses how to re-edit (and eventually ‘exhibit’) the corresponding dismantled image (multiple) in another situation so that the un-presented part (the truth) in that multiple may appear and/or be half-spoken (to the extent that chance allows it to be); 3) it pedagogically de-monstrates for audience how the layering of presentation operates (and what effects it can produce) as a mechanism of representation, thereby 'educating' the viewer/witness, insofar as it teaches him/her how to read the traces of the work carried out and the automatic choices made by the state of the situation. This triadic operation, which the text unifies under the notion of the essayistic, always begins with an attempt to dismantle one image or another – to cut the suture that subordinates it to its situation and its state.

## **Fifth Chapter: Conclusion**

In this dissertation, the essay (understood as an attempt) was presented as an ontological problem – as a peculiar (im)possibility that manifests at the level of various media as an interval or gap between document and fiction, objective and subjective, science and art, criticism and artistic work, etc. To analyze how this (im)possibility works and/or operates in the context of our contemporary audiovisual situation, it was first assumed (through Alain Badiou) that the essay can be viewed as the name (or at least one of the figures) of (non)human experience, which marks the progressive unfolding of the (un)realizable evental horizon of being-human. The dissertation sought to show that this experience is realized in the form of specific attempts – subjective works/bodies, which work through the available material (the samples) in an (ontological) situation. In other words, the text started from the choice to view the attempt 'pragmatically' – as a sheaf of operations that (in this case) are applied to the available audiovisual materials in order to force the emergence of some evental (im)possibility (of radical change at the level of the audiovisual situation). This sheaf of operations was called 'the essayistic,' and in the present text, three forms of working through were distinguished: polemics (operational criticism), curatorship, and pedagogy.

Each operation was illustrated with examples of specific activities that define essay writing as an audiovisual practice. For instance, polemics was primarily conceptualized through the idea of de-montage, editing, or desuturing scenes from films, videos, and television broadcasts. Generally speaking, it can be argued that polemics was treated as an experimental conflict with representation, understood through Badiou as an operation of the state of a given (cinematic) situation. In this sense, the goal of polemics is to cut through the sutures that conceal not only the artificiality of representation and the labor that went into it but also the abyss (truth)

that every state (un)presents. Curatorship on the other hand was mainly considered as re-montage and care for the potential names and places of truth, or in other words – as selecting, preserving, juxtaposing, and exhibiting audiovisual materials in new, diverse contexts. Thus, curatorship was found to be closely tied to the idea of the memory of the past (event) as a condition for changing the present (and future) of a situation.

Pedagogy, in turn, was presented through the idea that the essayistic de-monstrates the (potentially) traumatic truth that the situations (and consequently the worlds) we inhabit are extremely conditional, variable, and (in a sense) fictional, i.e., built on a foundation of the void which they repress in order to remain as they are (not). The essayist achieves this by revealing to the viewer the inherent logic of the techniques underlying the production of a given media object – examples included the desktop documentary films of Kevin B. Lee and projects like Harun Farocki's "An Image". The dissertation also showed that essayistic pedagogy is related to (Lacanian concept of) desire, insofar as it can be described as a de-monstration of (or familiarization with) the lack that underlies every representation. From this perspective, I argued that the subject of the audiovisual essay seeks to convey the experience of his attempt by generating a desire for attempting in the viewer/witness of the de-monstration.

It is important to note that the effects produced by these three operations are a matter of chance [hasard] or fate [tyche] in a psychoanalytic sense (the function of contingency in Badiou is largely conditioned by the role it plays in Lacan). Additionally, it should be emphasized that the attempt was also defined through its inevitable failure (or rather its terminus). In other words, whatever eventual effects (small or large) the three essayistic operations produce, they sooner or later fade away along with the (memory of the) body that performed them. Therefore, essayistic succession is crucial for the unfolding of (in)human experience as a series of failures (a finite number of essayistic interventions), which are discontinuously passed down from essayist to essayist in the form of a desire to articulate and embody the truth/event.

Additionally, building not only upon Badiou's but also on Timothy Corrigan's work, the dissertation proposed a situational taxonomy for categorizing audiovisual essays based on their relationship to one or more of the four procedures of truth according to Badiou – art, science, politics, and love. If the attempt unfolds in the realm of only one of these procedures, then it is what Corrigan defines as an "editorial", which publicly challenges and works through the state of the situation in one of these spheres. When an attempt tackles another attempt within a specific

procedure, it can be referred to as a theoretical essay. This type of essay refracts and reveals the conditions and eventual horizons of other essayistic works. Finally, we have 'philosophical attempts,' which are also called (self-)refracting, insofar as they explore and work through their own conditions, which in an audiovisual context most often includes attempts that tackle the technical and aesthetic (im)possibilities of the cinematic. This definition of the philosophical essay was derived from the fact that for Badiou, 'philosophy' should be understood as an operation that serves as a midwife to the truths produced by other procedures, which (as such) are the conditions of its existence.

There is another important aspect of the dissertation which concerns how we conceptually differentiate between different terms in the field. By reviewing texts on audiovisual essay writing, the work concluded that most studies neglect or underestimate the role of essays online. The dissertation found that many researchers and institutions strive to critically distance themselves from popular forms of audiovisual essay writing, i.e., those one may find on platforms like YouTube or even TikTok. Arguments were presented as to why it is not appropriate to distinguish 'high' essayistic works (which are most often the academic ones) from 'low' ones (which often are formally and content-wise more engaging even though they can be viewed as a form of mass culture). However, since no one has explicitly dealt with videographic essayism online (in all its forms), the text suggested that we could distinguish it from previous forms of essay writing by defining attempts on the internet as being 'networked.' At the same time, this was not the only issue where the dissertation critically diverged from academic attempts to define and cultivate a conception of audiovisual essay writing as an elitist, academic practice, institutionally developed with the help of workshops and specialized publications/platforms. The text tried to show from differing perspectives that essayistic cinematography, understood as reading and writing with images and sounds, should not be promoted solely in higher educational institutions, as it might be a productive tool for cultivating general media literacy in the average internet user. Therefore, the question was raised as to whether it would be beneficial to teach some of the practices associated with audiovisual essay writing at the school level.

While developing the topic of networked essays, the dissertation clarified that there was another reason for defining contemporary essays as networked rather than, for example, 'digital,' even though they are indeed such with regard to their medium. To justify this choice and more



specifically to analyze the dimensions of the attempt in our contemporary context, the text sought to align Manovich's theories of the digital with Badiou's philosophical framework (focusing primarily on the first two volumes of *Being and Event*). The goal was to show that there are operational homologies between Manovich's concepts of sampling and quantification, databases and transcoding, and Badiou's concepts of presentation and representation, the encyclopedia of the situation, and intra-wordly appearance. The dissertation demonstrated that the network could be thought of as a virtual world built on a real, 'ontological base' of digital samples, coextensive with the diegetic space of the interface through which the subject of the attempt progressively and polemically desutures the terms in the encyclopedia, which imagine themselves as "real atoms" in this world. The trajectory of this subjective move, which judges name by name (or option by option) the things recorded in the encyclopedia, was called, following Badiou, an "enquiry", which in Manovich's terms was translated as a "decoding" – decoding the ways in which the ontological base is transcoded into coherent phenomena. In this way, the network becomes a kind of 'field of struggle,' which the subject of the attempt traces as an expanding but finite void, separating the past (the state of the situation) from the (im)possible eventual present to which the subject is faithful.

In the end, the text explains that the decision to treat audiovisual essay writing through Badiou's work was driven by a desire to show that the traumatic effects that new technologies often have on people could (at least on paper) be worked through and utilized in the name of (perhaps trivial) human values such as education, care, and the possibility of living in a more open, communal, and critical world. Here, the 'non' from 'human' and 'possibility' is deliberately excluded because, beyond academic discourse, theoretical constructions, and complex arguments, the text advocates for the idea that for those who still believe in humanity, there should be no such conditional statements. And although the dissertation acknowledges that this faith is constantly shaken and assaulted by endless and diverse failures, it still defends the thesis that this does not cancel out the horizon of the attempt as something that is always passed on and undertaken anew, with hope that the void of truth is more radiant than that of despair, fear, and obscurantism. Therefore, the dissertation concludes with the following quote from Samuel

Beckett (one of the key authors of the 20th century for Badiou): "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."<sup>127</sup>

### **Contributions of the Dissertation**

1. The dissertation represents the first detailed study of the audiovisual essay in Bulgaria.
2. The work applies for the first time Alain Badiou's philosophical framework to address the question of audiovisual essay writing.
3. The text offers a comprehensive (ontological) theory of the essay, understood as an attempt (at an event).
4. Building on Badiou's ideas about the event, situations, and worlds, the dissertation develops an original concept of operational and/or polemical criticism.
5. The text presents curatorship as an ontological operation through Badiou's previously unexamined notion of care.
6. The dissertation develops an original concept of essayistic pedagogy as demonstration and familiarization.
7. The concept of suture of Jean-Alain Miller, Jean-Pierre Oudart, and Badiou is revised and expanded.
8. The dissertation offers its own approach to reading/interpreting media objects and audiovisual materials.

---

<sup>127</sup> Samuel Becket, *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho: Three Novels* (Victoria: AbeBooks, 1995), 101

### **List of publications**

1. Goncharov, Stefan. “The use of technical images in Annie Ernaux’s books” in *Literaturata* XVII, no. 31 (2023): 203-222.
2. Goncharov, Stefan. “ War and the (un)imaginable: between power and the reality of technical images” in *Sotsiologicheski problemi* 55, no. 1 (2023): 36-53
3. Goncharov, Stefan. “Beyond the Snare of Reflection: Blog Theory and Hyperstition” in *Filosofiya–Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2023): 70-80

## Bibliography

Дьо Монтен, Мишел. *Опити: Книга първа*, прев. Тодор Чакъров. София: Наука и изкуство, 1975-1980. [Dyo Monten, Mishel. *Opiti: Kniga parva*, prev. Todor Chakarov. Sofia: Nauka izkustvo, 1975-1980.]

Adorno, Theodor. "The Essay as Form" in *Essays on the Essay Film*. edited by Nora Alter, 60-81. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Alter, Nora M. *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

Astruc, Alexandre. "The Future of cinema" in *The Third Line*, 9. (2017):

<http://thirdrailquarterly.org/alexandre-astruc-the-future-of-cinema/>

Astruc, Alexandre. "The Birth Of A New Avant-garde: La Camera-stylo", New wave film.

<https://www.newwavefilm.com/about/camera-stylo-astruc.shtml>

Badiou, Alain. *Being and Event*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006.

Badiou, Alain. *Cinema*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.

Badiou, Alain. *Lacan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

Badiou, Alain. *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

Badiou, Alain. *Number and Numbers*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008.

Badiou, Alain. *Philosophy for Militants*. London: Verso, 2015.

Becket, Samuel. *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho: Three Novels*. Victoria: AbeBooks, 1995.

Bensmaïa, Réda. *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press.

Bense, Max. "The Essay as Form" in *Essays on the Essay Film*. edited by Nora Alter, 52-54. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Burgard, Peter J. *Idioms of uncertainty*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989.

Chesterton, G. K. "The Essay" in *Essayists on the essay: Montaigne to our time*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 57-60

- Corrigan, Timothy, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Conway, Kelley. "A New Wave of Spectators": Contemporary Responses to Cleo from 5 to 7. *Film Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 38-47
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Desan, Philippe *Montaigne: A life*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 2017.
- Papazian, Elizabeth and Eade, Caroline. eds. *The Essay Film: Dialogue, Politics, Utopia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
- Garwood, Ian. "Writing about the Scholarly Video Essay: Lessons from [In]Transition's Creator Statements", *The Cine-files* no.15. (2020)
- Hollweg, Brenda and Krstić, Igor. *World Cinema and the Essay film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.
- Huxley, Aldous. *Collected Essays*. New York: Bantam Books, 1964.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002.
- Lacan, Jacques. *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts Of Psychoanalysis*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998.
- Labarbe, Claire. "Composed, Altered and Transformed: The Other Self in Seventeenth-Century English Character-Books", *XVII – XVIII: Crime and Criminals* 76 (2019)
- Lee, Kevin B. "New Audiovisual Vernaculars of Scholarship", *The Cine-Files*, no.15. (2020) <https://www.thecine-files.com/new-audiovisual-vernaculars-of-scholarship/>
- Le Forestier, Laurent, Timothy Barnard, and Frank Kessler. "Montage". In *Montage, Découpage, Mise En Scène: Essays on Film Form*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021.
- Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.
- Manovich, Lev. "What is digital cinema". In *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, edited by Shane Denson and Julia Leyda, 22. Falmer: REFRAIME Books, 2016.
- Miller, Jacques-Alain. "Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)", *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, 1. (1966). <http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/pdf/cpa1.3.miller.tr>
- Oudart, Jean-Pierre. "Cinema and Suture." *Screen*, 18. (Winter, 1978). [https://www.lacan.com/symptom8\\_articles/oudart8.html](https://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/oudart8.html)
- Rascaroli, Laura. *How the Essay Film Thinks*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Renov, Michael. "The Electronic Essay" in *Essays on the essay film*. edited by Nora Alter, 172-182. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Slaymaker, James. "Enter the Memory': Interactivity, Authorship, and the Empowered Spectator in the Digital Audio-Visual Essays of Chris Marker", *Open Screens* 6(1). (2023)

<https://doi.org/10.16995/OS.8477>

Spielmann, Yvonne. *Video: The Reflexive Medium*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.

Starobinski, Jean. "Can One Define the Essay?" in *Essayists on the essay: Montaigne to our time*, edited by Carl H. Klaus, Ned Stuckey-French, 110-111. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2012.

Steyerl, Hito. "The Essay as Conformism" in *Essays on the essay film*. edited by Nora Alter, 60-81, 282-283. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Vassileva, Julia and Williams, Deane. *Beyond the Essay Film: Subjectivity, Textuality and Technology*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020.

Warner, Rick. *Godar and the Essay Film: A Form That Thinks*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017.

Y. Gasset, José Ortega, *Meditations on Quixote*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso Books, 1989.

## **Multimedia**

Bresson, Robert, dir. *The Trial of Joan of Arc*. France: Agnes Delahaie Productions, 1962.

cabooseblueteam. "I've Compiled a List of Every Noteworthy YouTube/Vimeo Channel Similar 'Every Frame A Painting!'" *Reddit*. Accessed June 7.

[https://www.reddit.com/r/videoessay/comments/480hbs/ive\\_compiled\\_a\\_list\\_of\\_every\\_noteworthy/](https://www.reddit.com/r/videoessay/comments/480hbs/ive_compiled_a_list_of_every_noteworthy/)

ContraPoints. Youtube channel. Accessed June 7, 2024.

<https://www.youtube.com/@ContraPoints>

deepdivenewsletter. TikTok channel. Accessed June 7, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@deepdivenewsletter>

Graham, Dan, dir. *Rock My Religion*. New York: Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), 1982-84.

<https://vimeo.com/5445916>

Franju, Georges, dir. *Le sang des bêtes*, France: Forces et voix de la France, 1945.

Freed, Hermine, dir. *Art Herstory*. United States, 1974.

Holt, Nancy and Richard Serra, dir. *Boomerang*. United States, 1974.

Khalil, Jirard. "I bought EVERY Nintendo Wii U & 3DS game before the Nintendo eShop closes". Youtube video, 19:39. March 18, 2023.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujHUMG0Uovs&ab\\_channel=TheCompletionist](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujHUMG0Uovs&ab_channel=TheCompletionist)

Kutina, Ted. "The Importance of Real Things". Youtube video, 17:35. May 2, 2024.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0DzXAx9qjI&ab\\_channel=TedKutina](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0DzXAx9qjI&ab_channel=TedKutina)

Leeson, Lynn, dir. *Electronic Diaries*. 1984-96.

<https://fourthree.boilerroom.tv/film/electronic-diaries-part-1>  
<https://fourthree.boilerroom.tv/film/electronic-diaries-part-1>

Lextorias. “Video Game Piracy Is Good, Actually”. Youtube video, 33:34. February 14, 2024.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fu4pE46-zM&ab\\_channel=Lextorias](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fu4pE46-zM&ab_channel=Lextorias)

Marko, Aaron. “A video essay about media preservation | All We Are Is What We Remember”. Youtube video, 26:45. February 16, 2024.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2baU5NYwoI&ab\\_channel=AaronMarko](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2baU5NYwoI&ab_channel=AaronMarko)

Nerdwriter1. Youtube channel. Accessed June 7, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/@Nerdwriter1>

The Cinema Cartographer. “The Greatest Directors You Don't Know”. Youtube video, 39:11. October 31, 2020.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9g94T\\_xNdAk&ab\\_channel=TheCinemaCartography](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9g94T_xNdAk&ab_channel=TheCinemaCartography)

The Couch Critic. “The Dark Reality of Streaming Services | Video Essay”. Youtube video, 10:14. March 10, 2024.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOMOhNvvCmY&ab\\_channel=TheCouchCritic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOMOhNvvCmY&ab_channel=TheCouchCritic)

Meadows, Queline. Trocan, Irina. Webb, Will. “The best video essays of 2023”. BFI.org.uk. December 19, 2023. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/polls/best-video-essays-2023>

Resnais, Alain, dir. *Nuit et brouillard*. France: Argos Films, 1956.

Richter, Hans, dir. *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. United States: Art of This Century Films, 1947.

Rosenbach, Ulrike, dir. *Reflections on the Birth of Venus*. 1978. <https://stiftung-imai.de/en/videos/katalog/medium/0025>

Rosler, Martha, dir. *Martha reads Vogue: Wishing, Dreaming, Winning, Spending*. New York:

Scullion, Chris. “These Are The 1,000 Digital-only 3ds And Wii U Games Disappearing Next Week”. VideoGameChronicle.com. March 22, 2023.

<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/features/analysis-digital-only-wii-u-3ds-games/>