

RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES OF THE AUDIOVISUAL ESSAY FORM

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technologies, which is constantly improving, provides more convenient access to video editing software. Therefore, specialists in the field of Film Studies began to successfully use technological advances to create reviews and analyses about films. These objects receive different names – video essays, audiovisual essays, visual essays etc. We will use the term ‘audiovisual essay’, and define it as a composition, usually less than thirty minutes in length, that expresses ideas through moving images and sound from the media under analysis, often with the use of voice-over to convey the argument.

At present, the audiovisual essay is used mainly in the field of Film Studies, Digital Humanities, and Media Studies. This is a consequence of, as it is often explained, an association between the form of the audiovisual essay and the subject matter of the above-mentioned disciplines. The trend, however, reflects the fact that scientists representing these disciplines are usually more familiar with the technical aspects of the production of such works, which facilitates the use of the format. In practice, the form of the audiovisual essay can be correlated with various objects of research in other disciplines.

The audiovisual essay as a form can be used in various fields of humanities. Above all, images and sounds are more expressive than the written word. It means that they are more engaged in expression and aesthetics than texts that often focus on the content. Because of this, an audiovisual essay can be useful for analyzing aesthetic characteristics. In this context, Alain Jaubert’s *Palettes* TV series (1989–2003) is a good example of a kind of audiovisual essay protoform. In *Palettes* the camera movement, montage, and narration are used as methods of painting analysis.

The audiovisual essay can be employed in Performance Studies. In this field of study, a kind of research can be conducted by/through art – a form

of ‘soft science’ in which the artwork itself is seen as both a ‘process’ and a ‘research outcome’ (Hauptfleisch 2009: 44). Shannon Jackson assumes that in the case of some forms of art it is particularly important to oppose the displacement of their meaning to ‘so-called publications’ (Jackson 2009: 162).

The audiovisual essay has a significant advantage over the text in presenting complex analyses, e.g. *Performative Ethnographies of Migration and Intercultural Collaboration in Arrival Cities: Hanoi* (2020)¹ carried out by the Vietnamese/Swedish group *The Six Tones* in collaboration with director Jörgen Dahlquist and composer Kent Olofsson. Their work combines documentary films, interviews, and theatrical performances. The authors of the study aimed to present experiences of migration from a village to Hanoi. Based on ethnographic field research into the lives of street vendors and individual stories of performers, the *Arrival Cities: Hanoi* project was created, combining documentary and artistic elements. The authors of the study say that they were curious about how performative ethnography can become a method of practice based on ethics and art that emphasizes the role of empathy and sharing of individual life stories. The effectiveness of the audiovisual essay use in this context is linked not only to the possibility of combining and presenting different sources in their original form but also to the creation of special emotional content in the form of an essay, which is essential for such a study.

The nature of the audiovisual essay is strongly related to visual turn in social sciences and humanities – the need to pay close attention to images and the power they have over us. William John Thomas Mitchell explains this with what he calls the ‘Medusa effect’ (Mitchell 1996: 5). The image, like a mythical creature, casts a spell on the viewer and deprives them not so much of bodily freedom of movement but of critical distance. As a result, the viewer cannot see through the mechanisms of manipulation. The viewer is unable to recognize the images as a constructed sign and uses the visual statement as self-evident. With the loss of critical distance from the image, the viewer misinterprets his or her relationship with the world and loses the possibility of an active, reason-driven relationship with reality.

For the context as a certain space in which the meaning of the interaction is created, it is important to consider the image and the point from which it is viewed. Marcus Banks defines two positions: the content of the image (internal narration) and the contexts in which it is interpreted

¹ <https://jer.openlibhums.org/articles/10.16995/jer.19/> (Accessed: 30.12.2020).

(external narration) (Banks 2001). Gillian Rose also draws attention to the aesthetic-technological aspect of visual objects and their social dimension (Rose 2006).

The audiovisual essay is a particularly appropriate form for questioning ways of seeing, looking, and perceiving, because in it the researcher also plays the role of the spectator. In this context, the audiovisual essay can concentrate on various visual aspects of social life: on the understanding of the processes of representation and the formation of the meaning of images; on the cycle of production and consumption of images; on the concept of the gaze and the idea of visibility as a social construction that the observer always looks from a particular position, which determines the breadth of his horizon and his relationship to the observed subjects or objects.

The above-mentioned research approaches unfortunately have not been fully extended in audiovisual essays yet. However, for the moment, among the whole range of audiovisual essays, it is possible to distinguish some directions that not only show the audiovisual essay as a ‘container’ for the presentation of research results but also demonstrate possibilities of the very process of creating audiovisual works. This work will structure and analyze some of the directions that have already taken shape, and project other possible ones.

1. Performativity of the Audiovisual Essay

In Film Studies, video and audio are the key research elements. However, the representatives of this movement till the end of the 20th c. were ‘alienated’ from their object of study. Cinema theorists initially based their reasoning mainly on the memories of the film they had watched, however with the introduction of video media they were allowed to study the material more closely (Michelson 1990: 23).

Even more, opportunities have arisen with the development of digital technology and access to new software. Program for video and audio editing facilitate detailed analysis of film components. On that basis, Laura Mulvey developed the delayed cinema method (Mulvey 2006). The method consists in cutting one scene from the film and analyzing it in slow motion with stopping at key points of the scene. Mulvey says that such a process makes it possible to find hitherto unexpected meanings hidden in the sequence (Mulvey 2006: 144). Delayed cinema creates a ‘pensive spectator’ – delayed video not only allows seeing details but also the time to reflect on what one has seen (Mulvey 2006: 186). Catherine Grant believes that this mode fits perfectly into the hermeneutics of cinematic

intertextuality (Grant 2013). She actively uses this method in her practice and links it with the approach to cinematic intertextuality described by Mikhail Yampolsky in *Memory of Tiresias. Intertextuality and Cinematography*.

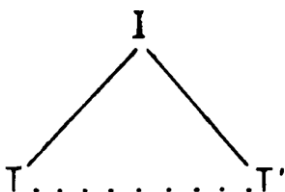
The term ‘intertextuality’ has been introduced by Julia Kristeva to denote the process by which poetic meaning relates to different textual spaces. (Kristeva, 1969: 255). Yampolsky in his book demonstrates how filmmakers, by using intertextuality, create many conscious and unconscious chains of associations for the specific analysis of the works (Grant 2013).

Yampolsky describes several ways in which a quotation can exist in a text. One of the options is the anomalous presence effect (Yampolsky 1993: 68) when a quote violates the linear development of the latter and receives a motivation that integrates it with the text beyond it (Yampolsky 1993: 62). Such quotations stand out – if the recipient does not have a semantic context, they can at least perceive its presence. More interesting is the situation of hidden quotes. Yampolsky gives the example of Godard’s film *In the Last Breath* (1960). In an episode, the heroine looks through a rolled-up poster in the form of a tube, thus the director quotes a scene from Samuel Fuller’s *Forty Guns* (1957) in which one of the protagonists looks at his antagonist through the sight of a gun (Andrew 1988: 18). This quote refers, through Fuller’s film, to the film noir – it confirms the belonging of Godard’s film to a certain genre and sets out the voiceover codes corresponding to this genre (Yampolsky 1993: 63). Yampolsky says this quote could not have been found if the director himself had not said so.

A film historian familiar with the influence of film noir on the French New Wave could use the possibilities of an audiovisual essay to compare two films from two streams in a video editing software and find, if not this particular quote, then other similar hidden relationships. Grant believes that audiovisual essay activates conscious and unconscious empirical, affective, as well as retroactive relations between the explorer and the film, which become inseparable from our acts of spectatorship and retrospectivity (Grant 2014). This applies not only to the expert knowledge of the research but also to the whole person of the researcher. It can be seen as a continuation of Walter Benjamin’s idea of the cinematographic camera as an opportunity to open up unconsciously contained space – moments unknown, deliberately overlooked (Benjamin 2012: 222). The audiovisual essay helps discover initially unseen connections between the work and the consciousness or unconsciousness of the essayist with all their socio-cultural and personal characteristics.

Grant describes how the process of work on the audiovisual essay *Rites of Passage* (2013)² opened the feministic and psychoanalytical context of her film preferences (Grant 2014).

When we correlate the above with Michael Riffaterre's intertextual concept then, on a semiotic level, the researcher becomes an interpretant. Riffaterre borrowed the term from Charles Peirce to explain the binary intertextual pattern of anomalies that cannot be normalized by intertext alone (Riffaterre 1988: 302). Riffaterre proposes a graphic representation of intertextual relations in the form of Gottlob Frege's transformed semiotic triangle:



where *T* stands for 'text', *T'* – intertext, and *I* - interpretant. Riffaterre observes: 'Intertextuality does not function, and consequently a text is not a text unless the reading passes from *T* to *T'* through *I*, and the interpretation of the text, in the light of the intertext, is a function of the interpretant' (Riffaterre 1988: 314). The interpretant/researcher ultimately allows abandoning the definition of the connection between the text and the intertext as between the source and its text-successor. It also provides an opportunity to better understand the meaning-making process.

The work of activating links cannot always be created just by taking a closer look, so Grant also uses a defamiliarization method. Defamiliarization is an incredible distancing effect caused by the change of perspective on a familiar object (Grant 2011). The distancing effect occurs by separating an object from a network of familiar associations. For example, based on techniques such as juxtaposition, scrolling, rotation, inversion, etc. The effects create an aesthetic that shows the materiality of the object in a different affective modality. For example, in *Mechanized Flights: Memories of Heidi* (2014)³ Grant changes the image of the main protagonist Heidi (1937, directed by Allan Dwan), played by Shirley Temple. Heidi becomes like a mechanical puppet of Pierre Jaquet-Droz, a clockmaker of the late 18th century who

² <https://vimeo.com/82092389> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

³ <https://vimeo.com/86428511> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

created his works for the entertainment of courtiers. In the film, the character played by Shirley Temple is used in the same way.

This method is very similar to what Barbara Bolt⁴ defines as material thinking⁴ (Bolt 2006). Material thinking offers a way of looking at the relations occurring in the process of practice itself. Barbara Bolt explains this concept by referring to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger says that cognition with the hands (the practice of active use of objects) works better than through the eyes (observation) because interaction allows the individual characteristics of objects to be understood (Heidegger 1996: 65). Bolt assumes that in the combination of the hand, eye, and mind, material thinking emerges. In connection with the materials and processes of practice, rather than through 'talk', we can understand the nature of material thinking. Words can allow us to articulate and communicate the realizations that take place through material thinking but as a way of thinking, material thinking requires a particular response or connection to the intelligence of the materials and processes in practice (Bolt 2007: 30).

Material thinking in audiovisual essay writing has gained popularity in Digital Humanities. One of the representatives of such an approach, Jason Mittell, proposed its new version – videographic deformation. Its principles are close to those of Grant, however, in practice, it differs slightly. One of the key aspects of Digital Humanities is a search for new ways of cognition, analysis, and presentation of digital information with various software and videographic deformation based on computation structures. An example of such an analysis is Mittell's experiment – equalized pulse, in which the average shot length in the film is measured and then all other shots are changed to adhere to this length. As a result, in a film with an average shot length of 4 seconds, the equalized pulse decreases the speed of a 1-second shot four times whereas the speed of an 8-second shot is doubled (Mittell 2019). If you match all the shot to the average pulse, the film will have the same duration and shot count as the original but most of the shots will be slowed down or sped up to match the average length. The results of such 'deformations' provide a new, rhythmic experience of the film and can create new concepts of its perception or interpretation. Mittell does not deform the whole film but focuses on particular scenes. Thus, one of his works is devoted to the *Winkie's Diner* scene in *Mulholland Drive* (2001, director David Lynch)⁵. In the scene, two characters talk about a dream and face it in reality. After

⁴ The term adopted by Bolt from Paul Carter.

⁵ <https://vimeo.com/151927132> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

equalizing to the 6.5-second pulse, the horrifying scene intensifies, slowed down close-ups with distorted voices highlight the phantasy and the slower tempo escalates the sense of anxiety that already pervades the scene.

Another version of videographic deformation is *Volumetric Cinema* (2015)⁶ by Ferguson. In this approach, the cinema is seen as a wave. The technique uses *ImageJ* software designed to visualize biological structures inside the human body⁷. Ferguson says that it provides the opportunity of ‘looking at film sideways’ and taking the film scene as an object not just of two spatial dimensions, rushing past in time, but as a spatiotemporal cube that can be manipulated, offering new methods of investigation into our understanding of moving image techniques such as editing, camera movement, etc.

2. Hypermediacy and Audiovisual Essay

One of the main founders of Media Studies, Marshall McLuhan, in his book *Understanding the Media, Human Expansion* coined the idea that ‘the medium is the message’ and the media is everything that mediates our interactions with the world or other people, and therefore shapes and controls the scale and form of human associations and actions (McLuhan 1994: 9).

The idea of McLuhan at the time of his book publication (1964) was very revolutionary and had a significant impact on both the scientific and cultural spheres. Some elements of the theory may require a revision, however, the main idea of the weight of medium experience is now more relevant than ever before. In everyday life, we use various media (both hardware and software) that become mediators between us and other people, material elements of reality, and information. Audiovisual essays are a form of mediation but they can also help us examine that situation. The most appropriate seems to be a desktop essay the essence of which consists of recording and demonstrating the process of media use. Technically speaking, the screen of a computer or smartphone becomes a frame for various software windows, applications, and Internet websites.

In *The Rise of Film TikTok* (2020)⁸ Queline unleashes the potential of one of the most popular mobile applications, TikTok, designed to create spontaneous short videos (up to 60 seconds). Queline demonstrates how the app works, shows its customization algorithm and trends in film-

⁶ <https://vimeo.com/119790662> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

⁷ Haematology, radiology, image analysis of computed tomography, axial tomography or positron emission tomography.

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqajurNSp1Q> (Accessed: 30.12.2020).

themed video, and reflects on the perspective of an audiovisual essay on the social network.

Another example is *Marketing Race, Gender and Activism through Bodyless Entities: A look at Brud's Instagram Robots* (2020)⁹ a study on Miquela, an Instagram robot, by Nicole Ucedo. Michela was created by *Brud*, a Los Angeles-based technology startup established by Sara DeCou and Trevor McFedries, who created several characters on Instagram to promote products and support ideas. Ucedo shows how products, based on different aspects of the robot's identity (digital skin, activism, gender, and sexuality) are targeted at specific user groups. The work confirms the idea of Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* in which gender, race, and class are constructs imposed on us by capitalist and colonial superpowers (Haraway 2018).

Despite the huge analytical potential of these works, desktop essay possibilities are not fully used. The screen space recording (medium experience) is used only for visualization of the end material, just like in other types of audiovisual essays. The key feature of a desktop essay is the ability to place the context in the form – conducting and demonstrating the research process in the same environment or in the same way in which it is being researched. In this aspect, the format becomes suitable for autoethnography. While Grant turns to autoethnography in the form of articles written based on her own experiences with the audiovisual essay, Chloé Galibert-Lainé combines these two concepts into a coherent whole. For example, in *Watching The Pain of Others* (2018)¹⁰ she creates a videographic diary with a detailed presentation of her experiences associated with the study on *Pain of Others* (directed by Penny Lane, 2018). The film *Pain in Others* focuses on a mysterious skin disease called 'morgellons' that has never been acknowledged by institutional medicine. Its symptoms can be as common as itching or rash, which means that nearly everybody can experience them. A film compiled of online patient videos demonstrates how the algorithmic dynamics of YouTube fuel the spread of the disease. Galibert-Lainé places herself and her thinking process on the screen and so she becomes one of the participants of the video blogs with their intellectual experiences, both emotional and bodily ones. Galibert-Lainé asks about the development of new forms of knowledge. It joins her approach with the concept of situated knowledge developed by Haraway in the context of feminist theory¹¹ (Haraway 1988).

⁹ <https://vimeo.com/466934240> (Accessed: 30.12.2020).

¹⁰ <https://vimeo.com/298425068> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

¹¹ Galibert-Lainé remarks that she bases her research on situated knowledge.

At the epistemological level, the concept of situated knowledge is an attempt to move beyond the dualism of objectivity and relativism. Haraway argues that by recognizing and understanding the randomness of their position in the world, and thus the contested nature of their claims to knowledge, researchers can produce knowledge with greater objectivity than if they claimed to be neutral observers. The only way to find a greater vision is to be concrete (Haraway 1988: 590).

Haraway says that the ‘eyes’ available in modern technical science destroy the idea of passive vision. They show by their example that all systems of visual perception are active and determined by specific ways of seeing or living. So, there is no passive camera obscura, each body and machine have specific visual capabilities that organize the world in different ways. (Haraway 1988: 583). Consequently, the practice of situational knowledge also implies a special way of seeing – one needs to learn to see ‘technically, socially and psychically’ (Haraway 1988: 583).

The practice of situated knowledge is well illustrated in another work by Galibert-Lainé *My Crush was a Superstar* (2017)¹². The work was carried out as part of a study of the terrorist context in various media. Analyzing affection for a Franco-Moroccan jihadist representative, Abu Abdullah Giton, and following his footsteps on the Internet, Galibert-Lainé outlines how romantic relationships become a cause of emigration for young European women.

Beyond the methodological approach, it is also interesting to note how Galibert-Lainé uses the possibilities of desktop essays to show the act of mediation with the media.

Most media operate in such a way that we are not able to feel the mediation. David Bolter and Richard Grusin call this effect immediacy. Immediacy is the ability of media to make the viewer or user forget about media presence and the act of mediation (Bolter, Grusin 2000: 11). The notion suggests that the medium can ‘erase’ itself so that the user can stand in an immediate relationship with the contents of the medium. In a psychological sense, through immediacy, the viewer can perceive their experience as real (Bolter, Grusin 2000: 69). Examples of immediacy: linear perspective in painting, 3D in cinema, etc. Immediacy creates a perception of the work as reality, which hinders its critical perception. It especially concerns video. In From Benjamin’s point of view, the viewer cannot think about what he or she wants, the place of his or her thoughts is taken by moving images – the viewer’s chain of associations is interrupted by changing images (Benjamin 2012: 225). In the context of

¹² <https://vimeo.com/200317440> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

media experience analysis, this moment creates the need to search for a method to destroy the effect of immediacy.

The opposite of immediacy is what Bolter and Grusin call the principle of hypermediacy. They argue that hypermediacy occurs when technologies of immediacy fail and therefore the main strategy is to be fascinated by the act of mediation itself (Bolter, Grusin 2000: 224). In epistemological terms, hypermediacy is opacity, the knowledge that information comes to us through the media. The viewer acknowledges being in the environment and knowing about the mediation acts. The psychological sensation of hypermediacy is the experience a person has in the presence of media, a statement that the very experience of using media is a real-world experience (Bolter, Grusin 2000: 70). A website exists through hypermediacy. In reality, hypermediacy is the fascination with the media attraction – Bolter and Grusin talk exactly about a moment of pleasure. Satisfaction can be understood in different ways, not only in terms of a certain attraction but also in terms of solving an intellectual problem or a moment of awareness. Perhaps a living example of it is the anamorphosis in Hans Holbein the Younger's painting the *Ambassadors* (1533) – an understanding of the transience of life based on how the appearance of one image removes another from view¹³.

In the 20th century, hypermediacy became a popular technique among artists. The beginning of the development of video art had, in fact, the effect of hypermediacy. The use of TV sets in a gallery created a dissonance of the usual screen experience in people who were used to associating such screens with entertainment. The moment is also linked to the freedom of the body and the temporal desynchronization that the gallery visitor had in contrast to the television or film viewer.

Similarly, the principle of hypermediacy has been implemented in the desktop essay. We are used to associating computer and smartphone screens with activity. For us, they are interactive screens. In the case of the desktop essay, we are no longer users, we become viewers, which makes a dissonance in our everyday habits. A desktop is a place of comfort and power – here you can do what you want. The desktop essay takes this away from the user and makes them an observer of other people's actions. Galibert-Lainé achieves it in her work with various techniques. For example, in *Forensickness* (2020)¹⁴ at the very beginning, after a couple

¹³ The image of the skull can best be seen from the side of the painting – in a position where it is already difficult to see the *Ambassadors*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNlgLSRZaos&ab_channel=WorldScott (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

¹⁴ <https://www.chloegalibertlaine.com/forensickness> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

of minutes, the video breaks, a message about a technical problem is displayed and you are on the Vimeo webpage. In this way, Galibert-Lainé reminds us that what we are watching is not a video but her activity. It is also relevant to the work presenting how users of Reddit¹⁵ investigated the terrorist attack at the 2013 Boston Marathon. In her audiovisual essay, Galibert-Lainé joins the main source with many mediation screens and, at the same time, openly demonstrates the research process.

Galibert-Lainé uses a very interesting technique in *Watching The Pain of Others* (2018). In one part of her work, she talks about her physical experience during film watching and study – she begins to examine the changes occurring on her skin, just as the women in the online video did. At this moment, her audiovisual essay becomes a collage of different spaces on one plane: she simultaneously explores her body with a smartphone, shows this process with a webcam, talks about her experience, and studies an article on the problem. At this point, the viewer has a dissonance in perceiving the different aspects of one person's actions and spatial perspectives in one space, which once again brings him or her back to understanding the process of mediation that guides interactions in contemporary audiovisual culture.

3. Gesture as an Object of Research in Audiovisual Essays

The birth of video is caused by scientific interest – the desire to examine the physical movements of humans and animals more closely. It started with Eadweard Muybridge's chronophotography and Etienne-Jules Marey in the '70s and '80s of the 19th century. Scientists such as Felix-Louis Regnault and Walter Baldwin Spencer used the Lumiere brothers' invention to observe technology and rituals in non-Western societies (MacDougall 1998, 126). The film became a scientific tool for testing the movement of bodies – the functional structure itself (moving images) corresponded to the object of the test. This approach can be continued for an audiovisual essay based on the analysis of gestures – body movements. A similar approach was used in the audiovisual essay *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (remix remixed 2013), published in the first issue of *[in] Transition: Journal of Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies*¹⁶. In it, Mulvey analyzed Marilyn Monroe's movement in a dance episode of the movie *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* by Howard Hawks (1953) based on

¹⁵ <https://www.reddit.com/>(Accessed: 25.02.2020).

¹⁶ <http://mediacommons.org/intransition/2014/03/04/intransition-editors-introduction> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

the method of delayed cinema (selected frames subjected to delay, repeat and return).

Giorgio Agamben, a creator of the new theory of ‘cinema gesture’ (Benjamin 2004), thoughts that film editing can free an image from a freeze-up and turn it back into a gesture (Agamben 2000). He explained this based on the work of Guy Debord, who was not only a theorist and a critic of the Society of the Spectacle but also a filmmaker, who directed six films between 1952-1978 (Levin 1989). In his films, Debord reveals the image in motion, exposing the conditions of film editing. In doing so, Debord reveals that film editing works under two conditions: repeat and stop. It repeats images to release the gestures recorded in them and holds the images so that we can think of the image as such. Just like it is done in delayed cinema.

This method was used in the works of Tracy Cox-Stanton and Isabelle McNeill, *A Woman Under the Influence*¹⁷ (2018) and *Perhaps we could have loved each other: Re-visioning women in la Boheme*¹⁸ in accordance.

For McNeill, the method of delayed cinema, along with other editing technics, serves as a way to strengthen the gestures of tenderness and liking between Mimi and Musette – characters from Puccini’s opera *La Boheme* (1896), the plot of which is used in various video works. In this way, McNeill rethinks cultural memory – the traditional interaction of women, in variations of this work, has focused on their relationship with the men around them. McNeill bases this approach on Adrienne Rich’s revision – on the act of looking back, looking with fresh eyes, putting an old text in a new critical direction (Rich 1979: 35). Also she bases the approach on the work of Sarah Ahmed (Ahmed 2017: 262-263) who pointed to the need to oppose the influence of the past on the present in the context of recreating ‘heteronormativity and whiteness’. McNeill changes the traditional meaning of a work created in a period of non-acceptance of non-normative behavior. In this way, the gesture in her work becomes an act of freedom – an expression of one’s preferences.

Vilém Flusser defined gesture as a movement that expresses freedom (Flusser 2004: 163). He stated that what makes movement a gesture is not that it is free, but that freedom is ‘somehow’ expressed – ‘by some technology’ (Flusser 2004: 175). In practice, the form of a gesture is determined not only individually, but also socio-culturally. Each gesture is part of a larger set or paradigm that it establishes and by which it is

¹⁷ <https://vimeo.com/259522472> (Accessed: 25.02.2020)

¹⁸ <https://maifeminism.com/perhaps-we-could-have-loved-each-other-re-visioning-women-in-la-boheme/> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

established. Lesley Stern says that the everyday body is also cultural, imbued with techniques that have been assimilated and taught, that are performed on an unknown and habitual level (Stern 2002). Even the 'out-of-body' gesture is a set of relationships, both imaginary and real, between movies and viewers, stars and fans, characters and actors¹⁹.

Cox-Stanton highlights this aspect in the first half of his audiovisual essay *Gesture in A Woman Under the Influence*. In it, she analyses the gesture of Mabel Longhetti, the protagonist of the film *A Woman Under the Influence* by John Cassavetes, which refers to the dance of the dying swan of the ballerina Anna Pavlova. As Cox-Stanton notes, a single gesture depicted in different bodies reveals the form of a bewildering distinction between beauty and grotesque, liberation and madness. In the case of Longhetti, the gesture becomes the expression of an 'inadequate state of mind', which links the gesture with the sphere of ethics and politics. Since gesture as a phenomenon is both an acted and a seen action, it is used as a means of judgment. Cox-Stanton reconstructs different ways of perceiving female hand gestures as abnormal signs, and beautiful and funny bodies, using photos from Jean-Martin Charcot's hysteria study as well as images in commercials and films. Each image is not an autonomous reality, meaning that each image is part of a larger set or paradigm that it establishes and according to which it establishes. The Cox-Stanton audiovisual essay does not lead to a clear statement, but rather creates an approach that completely negates the ease of objectifying female hands and gestures. Her work also combines the principle of the uncertainty of the essay format and the essence of the gesture.

Agamben argued that a gesture is a communication of communicability. On the one hand, it is always a statement that exists in the process of interaction. On the other hand, a gesture is always the impossibility of expressing something through speech – 'the gesture is essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure something out in language; it is always a gag in the proper meaning of the term, indicating first of all something that could be put in your mouth to hinder speech...' (Agamben 2000: 58). Hence, a gesture always exists on the verge of defining/hiding meaning, which makes it crucial to understand it through a process of real interaction or historical relationship.

Summing up, it can be said that gesture as a medium is not revealed in the static and historical and cultural isolation, which means that its study

¹⁹ Lesley Stern, referring to Eugenio Barba, points out that the distance that separates everyday body techniques from those performed outside the body is often neither obvious nor conscious (unlike, for example, India, Bali, China and Japan, which have highly formalized performance traditions) (Barba 1986: 94).

should be carried out through updating, reconstruction, or rewriting, which can be effectively done in an audiovisual essay using delayed cinema and the comparative method. The work of McNeill and Cox-Stanton shows the potential of this approach, which can be further developed and supplemented. In this way, the development of this field of audiovisual essay can restore the original research potential of video images concerning body movements, and at the same time place it in a broad disciplinary context.

4. Audio Thinking and Audiovisual Essay

So far, we have mainly talked about audiovisual essays in the context of their visual rather than audio elements. While most of the approaches discussed earlier in the article can be applied to the analysis of audio materials, it is worth paying special attention to the use of audiovisual essays in the field of Sound Studies. In this context, two main possibilities can be distinguished using the audiovisual essay: for presenting the results of Sound Studies or for showing the interaction and influence between sound and image.

The first possibility concerns the ability of the audiovisual essay to present the original material along with its analysis. To do this, one can extrapolate the technique Grant uses in his epigraph video – she writes comments on the image at various points in the video – for example in *Carnal Locomotive*²⁰ (2015). In the context of Sound Studies, the text on the screen will provide an opportunity to comment on temporary changes or details of an audio track.

In the context of Sound Studies, we can use in the audiovisual essay the method of using masks proposed by Michel Chion. This method works by alternately muting the picture or sound while playing the sequence. This allows us to hear the sound as it is, and not as the image transforms and masks it. It also allows us to see the image as it is, and not as the sound changes it. This process will encourage us to listen and see with fresh eyes, ‘open to the surprises of audiovisual encounters’ (Chion 1994: 187). This method also opens up an opportunity for comparisons that we can make by answering the questions: What can I see from what I hear? What can I hear from what I can see? (Chion 1994: 192).

To understand the meaning of sound, Chion suggests using three listening modes: causal listening, semantic listening, and reduced listening. Causal listening is listening to sound for information about its

²⁰ <https://vimeo.com/119051190> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

cause or source (Chion 1994: 25). If the cause is visible, the sound can provide additional information about it. Chion gives an example of the sound made by a closed container that is knocked on, and this knock indicates how full it is (Chion 1994: 26). When there is no way to see the cause of the sound, the sound can be the main source of information about it. The invisible cause can be identified from causal listening. However, Chion points out that we must be careful not to overestimate the causal listening ability to provide precise data based solely on sound analysis. He says that it can be the most deceptive way of listening (Chion 1994: 26).

We can also think of causal listening as what gives us information about space. In this regard, it can be correlated with Emily Thompson's concept of soundscape²¹ (Thompson 2012: 117). She defines the soundscape as an auditory landscape. Like a landscape, a soundscape is both a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment; it is both a world and a culture constructed to give meaning to this world. The physical aspects of a soundscape include not only the sounds themselves, the waves of acoustic energy that permeate the atmosphere in which people live, but also the material objects that create and sometimes even destroy these sounds.

*In his Sonic Chronicle Post Sound*²² (2020) audiovisual essay, Cormac Donnelly treats the film's soundtrack as a soundscape. He does it based on three films: *Zodiac* by David Fincher (2007), *The Post* by Steven Spielberg (2017), and *All the President's Men* by Alan Pakula (1976). These films include three editorial offices from the late 1960s and early 1970s. Donnelly uses the mask method to show how sound tells about the space of a room and the historical time in which events take place.

Although the soundscape is the space of our existence, we focus primarily on the human voice. Chion claims that if we hear voices speaking in an accessible language, we first look for the meaning of the words and proceed to interpret the other sounds only after our interest in their meaning is satisfied (Chion 1994: 6). The human voice is primarily related to semantic listening – with what relates to the code or language used to interpret a message. It is not only a spoken language but also Morse code, etc (Chion 1994: 28). This listening model is very important to understand the meaning, but is the least interesting in terms of sonic characteristics. From our point of view, it is worth supplementing it with

²¹ Thompson took the term soundscape from R. Murray Schafer. Schafer used soundscape as a definition that reflected his commitment to environmental movements in the 1970s and emphasized his ecological concern for the 'polluted' nature of the soundscape of that era (Thompson 2012: 117).

²² <https://vimeo.com/447138835> (Accessed: 30.12.2020).

other modes, because individual semantic listening is rather an object of research in linguistics.

The human voice can also become an element of the soundscape. For example, this is what happens in an audiovisual essay Nilüfer Ovalıoğlu Gros *Carrying the Nest: (Re) writing History Through Embodied Research*²³ (2019). This work, an embodied study, deals with the Armenian Genocide in Turkey. Gros uses recordings of singing from various ethnic groups in Southeastern Anatolia to create a context for the cultural space of her homeland. Also in singing, namely from Assyrian to Kurdish lullabies, Gros finds the unifying quality of the region – the sound of ‘ah’ creates an emotional reconstruction of a historical wound.

Chion took over the concept of the third mode, reduced listening, from Pierre Schaeffer who defined it as a listening mode that focuses on the characteristics of the sound itself, regardless of its cause and meaning (Schaeffer 1967: 270). Reduced listening perceives the sound of speech, music, noises, etc. as an object of research itself and not as a tool for something else. Chion says the reduced listening session is quite an educational experience. Participants quickly realize that when talking about sounds, they are constantly moving between the actual content of the sound, its source, and meaning. They learn that talking about the sounds themselves is not an easy task if the listener is forced to describe them regardless of cause, significance, or effect (Chion 1994: 29).

This mode can also be used for voice analysis. In this case, reduced listening performs a function of reduction in a way – it removes the meaning of words to emphasize the sonic characteristics of the voice (Cavarero 2012: 530). Liz Greene in her audiovisual essay *The Elephant Man's Sound, Tracked*²⁴ (2020) shows how the personality formation of the main character of David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980) was created by adding heavy breathing to his phrase: ‘I am not an animal...’. In this way, Greene emphasizes the values of the sound director – a specialty that was just beginning to emerge at the time of the film's premiere. Also, thanks to archival research and interviews, she transfers this topic into the context of industrial relations – a conflict, that arose at the production stage between the trade unionists and employees from outside the union about the sound content of the film – the English film crew did not understand the sound vision of the film's director and sound director, and wanted to remove ‘unnecessary noise’ from the protagonist's speech.

²³ <https://jer.openlibhums.org/articles/10.16995/jer.23/> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

²⁴ <https://vimeo.com/413827977> (Accessed: 30.12.2020).

Mladen Dolar says that we can almost certainly identify a person by voice, specific individual timbre, resonance, pitch, cadence, melody, and a particular way of pronouncing certain sounds (Dolar 2012: 545). The voice is like a fingerprint, instantly recognizable and identifiable. This feature of the voice does not contribute to the meaning, nor can it be described linguistically, since its features, as a rule, have no linguistic significance, they are slight fluctuations and variations that are additions to the norm. Impersonal voice, mechanically generated voice (answering machines, computer voices, etc.) reproduces a pure norm without any side effects and thus creates a strange voice. A voice without side effects is no longer a 'normal' voice. It is deprived of the human touch that the voice adds to the sterile machinery of the signifier. Side effects also play a role in the sense of what is pronounced. For example, intonation can turn the meaning of a phrase upside down by irony, etc. (Dolar 2012: 544).

The sonic qualities of a voice can also create an image of a person for us. In the audiovisual essay *Am I Pretty?*²⁵ (2017) Jennifer Proctor suggests focusing on voice characteristics and thus reflecting on the value judgments we make about other people. Proctor's work is a reorientation of the relationship between sound and image. The work is based on online videos in which young women ask YouTube viewers: 'Am I pretty?'. Proctor says such films were quite popular in 2012, and while the trend has largely subsided, they don't occasionally show up yet. In his work, Proctor uses only the sound elements of these films and replaces the visual part with 'female colors'. This approach involves an audio-based scoring mechanism, especially when the voices we hear require visual judgment. The girls in their speeches provide an opportunity for visualization as they tell vivid details about their appearance. But the key feature of the essay is that it makes you wonder what creates the vocal effect of a 'pretty girl': the timbre of the voice, accents, height, oratory, etc. This in turn raises an ethical problem – relying solely on voices, we realize the matter of our participation in maintaining the social norms of female 'attractiveness'.

Adriana Cavarero draws attention to the fact that the thematic approach to the primacy of voice-over speech also shows the political aspect of evaluating a person (Cavarero 2012: 531). For example, it manifests itself in the context of an accent. Dolar describes the accent as *ad cantum* – something that brings the voice close to singing, and a heavy accent suddenly makes us realize the material support of the voice, which we immediately reject. The standard norm is also an accent, only which has been considered non-accenting. Therefore, the accent has strong

²⁵ <https://vimeo.com/209277010> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

social and political connotations (Dolar 2012: 544). And this point can also be presented or explored through an audiovisual essay as well as other problems that open up for Sound Studies.

Some numbers of academic audiovisual essays that deal with Sound Studies can be found on the web today, but their amount is much smaller compared to other ‘visual’ works. We suppose that this situation can be solved based on interaction and exchange of theoretical and practical experience between representatives who use audiovisual essay and representatives of Sound Studies, because, based on the above information, there are many points of contact between these two directions. As a result, an audiovisual essay will gain new development opportunities, and Sound Studies will receive a new, effective tool for their research.

CONCLUSIONS

The existing variety of academic audiovisual essays shows that they can be successfully used both for the presentation of specific types of research as well as the practice of video and audio analysis. The role of the audiovisual essay is especially important in such approaches as: searching for intertextual connections; defamiliarization of research objects; presentation and analysis of media experience, gestures, and audiovisual relations. While these approaches are currently represented in a limited field of scientific disciplines, the interdisciplinary character of the content many of them have suggests that audiovisual essays can be used more widely.

The technical possibilities of audiovisual essays make the practice effective not only as a communication tool for visualizing a point of view but also as a research process for various tasks. In this context, the audiovisual essay becomes an intermediary concerning the knowledge – a product that promotes later discoveries.

In many ways, the future of an audiovisual essay in academia depends on the scientists themselves – the community that uses it – the more there are, the greater the research potential of this format will be unlocked. At the same time, the audiovisual essay is not a ‘panacea’ – the aim of this work was not to persuade scientists to abandon traditional formats, but rather to encourage them to pay attention to this format, especially if its capabilities coincide with their research interests and goals.

SUMMARY

The research opportunities and the promising directions for the development of the audiovisual essay are structured and analyzed in the article. According to the authors, audiovisual essays should be used in various fields of humanities. The first part of the article explores the concept of using the audiovisual essay as a performative method for searching for intertextual connections and the defamiliarization of research objects. As a part of the study of presentation and analysis of media experience in the audiovisual essay, several desktop essays are analyzed, including *Marketing Race, Gender and Activism through Bodiless Entities: A Look at Brud's Instagram Robots, The Rise of film TikTok, My Crush was a Superstar, Forensics, Watching The Pain of Others*. The authors also investigated the following aspects: gesture as an object of research in the audiovisual essays and using features of the audiovisual essay for Sound Studies.

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