

THE AUDIOVISUAL ESSAY AND ACADEMIC COMMUNITY: HIGHLIGHTS AND SPECIFICS OF USE

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation affects all spheres of human life, forming new models of our behavior. Such changes also affect the academic environment, as a need to grasp the potential of using the latest cultural and technological instruments accrues. In our opinion, one such instrument can be an audiovisual essay. Firstly, it is already actively used in various universities around the world; secondly, it is an effective mechanism for studying modern culture, which will interest both students and lectures. As part of our research, it is proposed to explore the potential of the audiovisual essay in an academic environment.

Currently, there are different interpretations and approaches to defining the concept of an audiovisual essay and its characteristics. In our work we consider an audiovisual essay as a work that is usually less than thirty minutes in length and expresses the ideas using moving images and sounds from the works under analysis, often with voice-overs for argumentation. Its origins began approximately in 2007 in connection with the development of new technical means that contributed to creative self-expression in the Internet space by fans of various films. Afterwards, representatives of the academic community began to apply to the audiovisual essays, using them to present research on cinema. Over time, the field of application of this type of essay has expanded significantly, as the audiovisual essay has begun to be considered as an educational tool in the field of Film Studies, Digital Humanities, and Media Studies.

The paper examines the different possibilities of using audiovisual essays in the context of various aspects of scholarly activity. It analyses the functioning of an audiovisual essay as a scholarly work: the characteristics of the format, the issues of copyrights related to the use of video and audio materials, and the possibility to use an audiovisual essay as a scholarly form in obtaining an academic degree. Various cases of the use of audiovisual essays in university education are analyzed since the scientific activity includes teaching. The audiovisual essay brings significant benefits to popular science activities, therefore its communication strengths are also examined.

1. Scholarly Form of the Audiovisual Essay

The scholarship is related to various sets of institutional imperatives, including measurable, quantitative assessment of scholarly accomplishments. Higher education administration requires a ready, hierarchical taxonomy for various types of scholarly works. In the context of the audiovisual essay, this raises questions regarding the possibility to adapt it to the existing scholarly standards. These include: ‘How many minutes of the audiovisual essay equals a word count of an academic article? Can three-minute and thirty-minute-long audiovisual essays be treated as works of the same volume? Should the audiovisual essay be provided with footnotes? Should scientists always add abstract to their works?’ Some scientists find these questions absurd, e.g. Erlend Lavik, who argues that a scholarly work ought to be motivated not by strategic calculations but by intellectual curiosity (Lavik 2020). Whereas Kevin L. Ferguson says that we ought to start with the essence of the new form and not the existing academic standards (Morton, Ferguson 2020). Catherine Grant believes that if we disregard the size criterion, there is no difficulty in incorporating audiovisual essays into the academic context (Grant 2013). She analyses the British governmental criteria regarding the relative assessment of research works and concludes that they may be used to assess audiovisual essays without distorting their form. These include standards such as:

Originality:

- Creative/intellectual development that provides an important and innovative input in understanding and knowledge. It may include substantive empirical findings, new arguments, interpretations or remarks, innovative ways of collecting information, developing new theoretical frameworks and conceptual models, innovative methodologies, and/or new forms of expression.

- An important reference point.

Significance:

- Strengthening or deserved broadening of knowledge, thinking, understanding, and/or practice.

- Significant development of scope and depth of research and its use.

Rigor:

- Intellectual consistency, methodological precision and analytical power, accuracy and scholarly depth, awareness and proper engagement in other significant works.

These criteria may vary in individual countries, however, in most cases, academic research is defined based on analytical, argumentative, and methodological rigor. For instance, Berg’s audiovisual essay *(un)reliable*

(un)reliability – or, Perceptual Subversions of the Continuity Editing System (2013)¹⁵ conforms to these standards.

One of the key features of the audiovisual essay is experimenting with its structure and ways of presenting information, which induces difficulties in creating a clear standard of formal requirements for this type of work. At this point, it is necessary to individually correlate each work with the above indicated academic requirements. It does not mean that we may not talk about formal academic requirements imposed on the audiovisual essay.

Lavik thinks that a review of the relevant literature and quotations do not suit the audiovisual essay format (Lavik 2020). Lavik concludes that the strength of the audiovisual essay lies first and foremost in its capacity to cite and engage with audiovisual material itself rather than to cite and engage with the written records of adequate academic traditions. (Lavik 2020). If a review of relevant literature may in fact ‘burden’ the poetic component of the audiovisual essay¹⁶, then the problem of quoting is not so significant. The majority of academic audiovisual essays use quotations. The situation is different because in the text format footnotes do not disturb the reading process thus it is possible to use a large number of quotations. In the audiovisual essay only the most important quotations are shown (in the form of text inscribed on the screen), also sometimes the essayists mention the references to other researchers in their voice narration. This aspect might be enhanced by using such captions as Tony Zhou does in his works to show the titles of the used films¹⁷.

In the context of quotations, the following formal question arises: what is the best way to mention quotations in an audiovisual essay? On one hand, we may say them aloud, but maybe it is more comfortable when a quotation is displayed as text on the screen. Such a situation creates an opportunity to read independently and makes it easier to find a location in the work than when we say the information aloud. On the other hand, we may present the quotation as text on screen only. But there comes a question of whether it should exist in silence. It is worth bearing in mind that such a technique would destroy the rhythm of the story – which may of course be a conscious aim. Music may also be played during the quotation, but if it wasn’t played before and after it, it will destroy the rhythm analogically to the case of silence. Moreover, the perception of some quotations ‘requires’ that they be said aloud.

Music is often used in audiovisual essays, which is sometimes criticized as a deviation from scientific rigor. Eric Faden recalls that one of his students

¹⁵ <https://vimeo.com/73310641> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

¹⁶ Simultaneously the audiovisual essayists still pass through the phase of browsing literature, in which case it includes also search for and analysis of other audiovisual essays on the topic, as well as the with audiovisual archives. It might be worth contemplating whether this component is necessary in an academic work, since the discussion with other points of view or continuation of some academic approaches is included in the text of the work itself.

¹⁷ *Joel & Ethan Coen – Shot | Reverse Shot* (2016), <https://vimeo.com/156455111> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

believed that music should not be part of audiovisual essays. She said: ‘When I turn in a paper, I don’t turn it in with a bottle of wine’. She felt music was doing the same thing – tainting the scholarly integrity of the work (Faden, Lee 2019). Faden himself says that in his opinion music makes it possible to provide criticism and scholarship with poetical quality (Faden, Lee 2019). Grant shares the same idea. She prefers to use music rather than her voice, since she thoughts that audiovisual essays should in the first place be perceived by a spectator as an experience. For example, in *The Haunting of The Headless Woman* (2018),¹⁸ she creates narration through captions.

Just as in the case of each form that assumes the creation of something new from the materials created by others, the audiovisual essaying generates questions related to the concepts of ownership, authorship, originality, and ethics. Jason Mittell in his article *But Is Any Of This Legal?* makes a review of the criteria describing the fair use of the existing materials (Mittell 2019). He says that an audiovisual essay is by definition a transformative use of original material, aimed at providing commentary, and criticism that fulfills the spirit of fair use. Additionally, an audiovisual essay is often noncommercial and educational, which also leans toward fair use (Mittell 2019). The issue of copyrights was brought out during workshops with Grant at *Essay Film Studio at the Visual Narrative Laboratory* of Łódź Film School¹⁹. The panelists concluded that as long as the audiovisual essay remains in a small form and has the character of criticism, the copyright issue does not appear. The situation changes when audiovisual essays are used in screenings at film festivals or distributed on DVDs. In such a case, the audiovisual essay acquires the meaning of commercial use, which often causes considerable difficulties. Nevertheless, the situation is substantially different in the case of using popular musical pieces in audiovisual essays, in particular, if they are used for creating a special rhythm and atmosphere. In such cases, the critical component of the audiovisual essay does not apply to the used soundtrack. Grant says that she avoids this problem by using music licensed under an open license. For instance, Creative Commons²⁰ permits diverse use of materials free of charge.

Another issue concerns online video-sharing platforms. There are major differences between Vimeo and YouTube²¹ in terms of fair use policies for copyright-protected content. In 2014, Vimeo launched its copyright match tool which uses an algorithm to detect the use of copyrighted third-party content (such as music). This system is, however, rarely used. Since Vimeo has a subscription-based business model (as opposed to YouTube’s advertisement-based model), the company has little motivation to actively

¹⁸ <https://vimeo.com/301095918> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

¹⁹ <https://vimeo.com/showcase/8455770> (Accessed: 31.05.2021).

²⁰ <https://creativecommons.org/> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

²¹ Facebook and Instagram have similar policies to YouTube

detect copyright infringement, as its financial success depends on attracting and supporting paying creators rather than appeasing copyright owners, which is outside its scope of activity. Notably, the platform's algorithms do not follow copyright law criteria and only search for similar content. They cannot measure the 'criticality' of a work, but only find the content and calculate its duration. As a result, a 'banned' publisher can try to have the ban completely lifted. One alternative to these platforms is CriticalCommons.org²², a non-profit site designed for scholars, allowing them to share videos for teaching and research purposes. It does not have an automatic removal system, and it supports fair use, which makes it useful for publishing video content with minimal risk of removal.

There is some genuine institutional concern about how to treat audiovisual essays in the context of employing and evaluating academics. Miklós Kiss notes that it is important to understand how one's work will affect one's academic CV and what impression it will make on potential employers or grant-makers (Kiss 2020). He claims that difficulties surrounding audiovisual essays in the social and practical reality give rise to questions about the worthwhile use of one's research time²³. It must be stated that this problem extends beyond the case of audiovisual essays – much scientific work in Sensory Studies transcends the traditional framework of a scientific paper or manuscript.

At present, several scientific journals²⁴ publish audiovisual essays, but their notoriety may not yet be established. Kevin L. Ferguson²⁵ recalls having to explain the quality of the journals and the value of his publications there to his superior (Morton, Ferguson 2020). His later activity was recognized, but only with his superiors' support. This was also made easier once the journal became reviewed in *[in]Transition* and joined the SCMS. Ferguson notes that, as a result, the approval of his audiovisual work for publication was evaluated in the same way as if it had been a printed work – owing to the journal's status in the field and to anonymous external review (Morton, Ferguson 2020). This demonstrates a path for evaluating audiovisual essays that can be used in other institutions. The specific nature of the educational institutions in which Ferguson works should also be considered. Outside of Film Studies, Media Studies, or Digital Humanities, which have already widely accepted the audiovisual essay format, academics' situation in this regard may be different. Among the thirteen scientific journals publishing audiovisual essays, ten are dedicated to Film Studies, Media Studies, or Digital

²² <https://criticalcommons.org/> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

²³ Notably, creating an audiovisual essay can be more time-consuming than writing an academic paper.

²⁴ Garwood has created a list of different journals that publish audiovisual essays, available at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/17i4YU1phHvuIKIJaz4utUxjFXh9e4DCV48H_snO_7pM/edit (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

²⁵ He is a lecturer at Queens College, a liberal arts college with nearly 20,000 students, which is part of the City University of New York, the largest urban university system in the USA.

Humanities. Furthermore, there is no significant regional diversity, which leads to problems with using audiovisual essays in different countries.

The academic journals that do publish audiovisual essays have different acceptance criteria. For instance, *Frames Cinema Journal* accepts such works based on a case-by-case discussion with the editors²⁶, while the *Journal of Embodied Research* requires that the publications, which they call ‘video articles’, have a specific duration (around 20 minutes)²⁷. In general, most journals also require the submission of a text of 300 to 2000 words accompanying the work, which can be an abstract, the author’s statement, or a video transcript. Kevin B. Lee is critical of this and claims that such a requirement implies audiovisual essay is a format that cannot exist independently (Lee 2020). We believe the approach should be interpreted in a different context. First of all, the accompanying text can offer journal editors a convenient way of initial content selection. Second, abstracts and keywords (though the latter are not listed as a requirement for audiovisual essays by many journals) are used to find publications in search engines. Third of all, the accompanying statement in an academic style also allows for distinguishing between vernacular and academic audiovisual essays.

One current issue related to audiovisual essays and their place in the academic field is the question of whether they can be substituted for a thesis or dissertation. If an audiovisual essay can meet the criteria for an academic paper and provide sufficient evidence of a student’s skill and expertise, then the main problem is quantitative. Like a traditional essay, an audiovisual essay is a short form, rarely exceeding 15 minutes. Standards regarding the volume of theses or dissertations vary between countries and typically depend on the title or degree in question²⁸. However, these papers are usually required to be longer than an essay. One solution could involve increasing the duration of audiovisual essays to equal that of a feature film²⁹. From my point of view, this would be incorrect – an audiovisual essay is best presented as a short form, and the ideal approach would be to find a way to reconcile complexity and quantity. This could involve developing one’s thesis as a collection or series of publications, which may be referred to as a ‘degree by published work’ or ‘compilation thesis’ (other, less formal, terms include *sandwich thesis* and *stapler thesis*). As opposed to a monograph, such a thesis includes a collection of scientific publications, supplemented with an introduction and summary of contents. This format dominates in natural sciences and medicine, while monographs remain the most popular format in humanities

²⁶ <https://framescinemajournal.com/submissions/> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

²⁷ <https://jer.openlibhums.org/about/submissions/> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

²⁸ In Ukraine, BA theses are usually 50-70 pages long, MA theses – 70-90 pages, and PhD dissertations – 155-200 pages.

²⁹ Audiovisual essays of such duration do exist. For instance, *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003) by Thom Andersen is 169 minutes long <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0379357/> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

cpf "uqekn' uelkpegu' k' Uy gf gp." vj ku' cr r tqcej "tghgtgf" vq" cu' kappan" kp" Uy gf kuj +ku'pqy "cnuq'i cklpi 'r qr wrctkv' "kp'uqekn'cpf 'r gf ci qi kcn'uwwf kgu⁵²"

Ceeqtf kpi " vq" P kercu" J ci gp." vj g" hqto cv' ku' uwkcdng" hqt" o wnk/ukgf " gvj pqi tcr j { " *J ci gp" 4233+0' J g" ucvgu" vj cv' ewwntcn' r j gpqo gpc" tgs vktg" c" ur gekn'cr r tqcej "cpf "o qf gu"qh'r tgugpvcvkp0' kpeqr qtcvki "kpf kxf wcn'o ketq/ ngxgn" *j gvtqi gpgqu" pgy qtmu+ "cnuq" cmqy u" qpg" vq" wpf gtucpf " vj g" o cetq/ ngxgn" *vj g" i mdcn' hgrf +." y j lej " cr r gct" cu" cp" go gti gpv' fko gpukqp" *J ci gp" 4233+0' Y g" gZR gev' vj cv' c" uko kct" cr r tqcej "eqwf "dg" cr r rkgf "vq" vj g" cwf kxkuwcn' guuc{ ." cu" kv' cnuq" eqpegtpu" c" xctkv' qh' ewwntcn' r j gpqo gpc0' Vj gtghqtg." cwf kxkuwcn' guuc{ u'uwdo kwgf "cu" c" eqo r krcvkp" vj guku' y qwf "eqpukwug" ugr ctcvg" ecug" uwwf kgu." kp" y j lej " f kxkpev' ctgcu" ctg" gZR nrtgf " y kj " xctkvu" qdlgevkgu." tgugctej " s wugkqpu." uwdlgeu." cpf " o gvj qf qm i kgu' C" eqo r ctukqp" qh' vj gug" -ecuguo' cpf " f kuewukqp" qh' vj gk" go gti gpv' cuqekvkpu" y qwf " i kxg" tkug" vq" f guetk vkpu" qh' c" j ki j gt" qtf gt." tgr tgugpvki " vj g" npqy nrf i g" eqpvkpgf " kp" vj g" gpvtg" vj guku' Hqto cm{ ." vj ku' eqo r krcvkp" *lwuv' rkg" c" r tkpvf " eqmgevqp" qh' r cr gtu' r tgugpvf "cu" c" vj guku+ "uj qwf "dg" uwr r ngo gpv' y kj "cp" kv' qf wcvkqp" cpf " c" uwo o ct{ "qh' vj g" o ckl' eqpenwukpu" htqo " vj g" vj guku' cpf " vj g" qdvkpgf " tguwu⁵³"

Dcugf " qp" vj g" cdqyg" kphqto cvkqp." qpg" o c{ " eqpenw' g" vj cv' vj gtg" ctg" pq" uki pkkcpv' hqto cn' qduweng" vq" wukpi " cp" cwf kxkuwcn' guuc{ " cu" cp" cecf go le" r wdrkcvkqp0' P cwctm{ ." vj gtg" ctg" o cp{ " o qtg" kuwgu" vj cv' uj qwf " dg" hwt vj gt" f kuewugf " cpf " emt kkgf 0' k' o cp{ " y c{ u. " utwewtcl' ej ctcevtkueu" f gr gpf " qp" vj g" kpf kxf wcn' ej ctcevtkueu" qh' vj g' y qtn' cpf " vj g" uej qm tu' qdlgevkgu' J qy gxgt." htqo " qw" r qkv' qh' xky . " vj ku' qxgtxky " qh' vj g" i gpgtcl' ej ctcevtkueu" qh' cwf kxkuwcn' guuc{ u'uj qwf "pqv' dg" r gtekgf "cu" c" rko kcvkqp. "dw" cu" c" uqwtg" qh' kf gcu' vq' hckkcv' vj g' wug" qh' vj ku' hqto " kp" cecf go le" eqpvzuo'

2. Audiovisual Essay as an Educational Tool

Vj g" f gxgnr o gpv' qh' pgy " f ki kcn' vej pqm i kgu" j cu" etgcvgf " c" pgy " i mdcn' uqekn' gpxktpo gpv." y j lej " j cu' ej cpi gf " vj g" y c{ " y g" y qtm" r m{ ." y tkv. " vj kpn' cpf " eqo o wplecvg0' k' vj g" hgrf " qh' gf wecvkqp. " vj ku' j cu' dkt vj gf " c" pggf " hqt" vj g" f gxgnr o gpv' qh' pgy " o gf kc" unkm0' P gy " o gf kc" unkm" ctg" -e" ugv' qh' ewwntcn' eqo r gvpekgu" cpf " uqekn' unkm" vj cv' { qwpi " r gqr ng" pggf " kp" vj g" pgy " o gf kc" ncpf uecr go' *Lgpnkpu" gv' cn" 422; <6+0' Vj g" unkm" ctg" dcugf " qp" v' c' kkpncn' t gcf kpi " cpf " y tkkpi " unkm." kpxguvi cvkg" unkm." vej p' kcn' unkm." cpf " etkkcni' cpcn' uku' unkm" *Lgpnkpu" gv' cn" 422; <' 6+0' P gy " o gf kc" unkm" ctg" vj g" tguwn' qh' vj g' uki pkkcpeg" qh' cwf kxkuwcn' o gcpu' qh' eqo o wplecvkqp. " y j lej " ctg. " kp" c" egtv' k' ugpug. " f ggr n{ " eqppgev' y kj " eqpvgo r qtct { " ewwntg" cpf " eqpvgo r qtct { " { qwj u'

⁵² "Qp" vj g" ej qleg" qh' vj guku' hqto cv' cpf " qp" y tkkpi " vj g" kappa" qh' c" vj guku' qhpublications" j wr u'ly gd0' tej kxg0' ti ly gd4234255237493: lj wr <lr gf ci qi kum' ctdvgf' w' ve' wo w' g' B cr klf gnkl' kgu' B22? O qpqi telka gntauco o cprci i kpi 0' fh' *Accessed:" 31.05.4242+0

⁵³ j wr u'ly y y 0' quwi tcf wcv' g' wy c' gf w' e' w' u' w' w' gpw' l' j guku' l' g' t' k' u' *Accessed:" 31.05.4242+0

An audiovisual essay may become one of the routes of development for new media skills.

It is worth mentioning that this is not the first time that the development of new technologies has influenced innovation in the learning process. At the end of the 20th century, Gregory Ulmer organized his research around the following problem: how do new photographic, film, video, and computer technologies alter what we refer to as ‘thinking’? Art played a key role in his approach, and he treated it not as an object of research, but as the hidden solution to the problem. To realize his concept, Ulmer turned to the surrealist methods, the dialectic method of Plato, and Derrida’s deconstruction (Ulmer 1994: 15). This approach created the form that he called *Mystory* (Ulmer 2003: 5). *Mystory* – myth and criticism in one. *Mystory* works on three levels of discourse: personal (autobiography), popular (social history, oral history, or popular culture), and expert (scientific disciplines). So *mystory* is formed at the level of personal interests – which is important for students themselves. On the one hand, this is a way to generate interest among students. On the other, for those students that as yet have insufficient knowledge of their discipline, personal experience can become a medium that will help them advance to the level of university education, with which some encounter difficulties, especially during the first year of study.

Mystory as a text form has both a cultural and scientific level, i.e. it integrates work with archives of various levels, which makes it similar to the format of an audiovisual essay. Another point that connects them is research potential. Ulmer believed that learning is much more similar to invention than verification. He said that the methods of academic writing which are currently studied at universities are rather oriented toward what’s already known, rather than the will to discover (theoretical curiosity), and so they discourage students from learning how to learn (Ulmer 1994: xii). Subsequently, Ulmer’s concept and experience were applied and developed in *composition studies*³². From our perspective, many aspects of the concept of *mystory* and Ulmer’s experience can also constitute grounds and be used as an important source of information for applying audiovisual essays in the area of education. Jools Gilson applies a similar approach³³ in a class called *Writing & Experiment*, as part of the course *Masters in Creative Writing* at the School of English (Gilson 2016).

The audiovisual essay can be used for various aspects of education. For example, Chiara Grizzaffi considered this format to be very effective in explaining educational materials and now uses it as an integral part of her courses at the IULM University in Milan. She notes that in an audiovisual essay, information becomes more concrete and takes on material density

³²For example, Jeff Rice formulated the idea of *-hip-hop pedagogy* (Rice 2007: 91).

³³ Jools Gilson – professor of Creative Practice, UCC University College Cork (UCC) in Ireland

through its images and sound, as well as transferred reflections through reading and/or written text, even where these concern the most abstract theoretical issues (Grizzaffi 2020).

The audiovisual essay can be useful in the context of online teaching and learning. We suspect that many lecturers during the COVID-19 pandemic had the experience that students often have difficulty concentrating on the topic of a lesson during learning online. This relates to the fact that computer screen is associated with a dynamic way of perceiving information. In our everyday work, in using computers we deal with constant movement (in videos, switching between windows, navigating elements of social media networks, etc.). It is an interactive screen – we are accustomed to actively interacting with it. This is also why, when it comes to listening to someone talk from that same screen, students can find it difficult to concentrate due to the fact they have adapted to different experiences. An audiovisual essay, as a result of its poetic-amusing approach, offers an opportunity for greater engagement with the content.

Audiovisual essays can also be helpful as a means to develop research skills. For example, Allison de Fren³⁴ uses supercut³⁵ (Fren 2020) for this purpose. She offers it to her students as a form of intermediate practice before concluding the final project. Fren gives the example of her student, Dana Stopler, who discovered the recurring motif of the ‘fish bowl’ in Mike Nichols’ film *.. e Graduate* (1967). The audiovisual essay *{Tanks} in the Graduate* (2020)³⁶ helped Stopler understand the end of the film, which is still discussed. In the last scene of the film, Benjamin (the protagonist) and his beloved Elaine, whom he has just convinced to leave her fiancé at the altar, jump onto the school bus to run away together. Once they sit down at the back of the bus, their triumphant smiles quickly turn to ambivalent expressions, the meaning of which is the subject of constant debate and disagreement among critics. The audiovisual essay helped Stopler understand that the key to understanding that scene is the film's last shot, in which the school bus looks very similar to an aquarium. She says that the constant use of water and aquariums, particularly in the final scene, reveals a cyclic narrative of imprisonment, which the protagonist attempts to escape (Fren 2020).

Amber Jacobs³⁷ also used the audiovisual essay as a way to develop research skills (Grant 2017). She used it as a method of thinking that allowed to move away from a textual or literary relationship with images. Jacobs discovered that her students usually perceive cultural objects as texts, which

³⁴ Allison de Fren teaches a third year seminar on writing, which covers all courses of study within the Faculty of Media Arts & Culture at the Occidental College in Los Angeles.

³⁵ Supercut is a type of audiovisual essay that commonly exhibits recurring patterns of aesthetics. Such works doesn't actually use voice over; just single piece of music or diegetic sound throughout the entire video, unless sound and music are in the focus.

³⁶ <https://vimeo.com/422946389> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

³⁷ Amber Jacobs conducts the course Visual Culture: power and image for students of psychosocial studies, psychoanalysis and history.

means that the audiovisual aspect is almost always lost. For her, the audiovisual essay became a way to make students aware of the nature of the medium. One of her students, Ian Magor, says that the possibilities of the audiovisual essay helped him overcome his frustration with analyzing a film without referring to its storyline (Grant 2017).

James Wicks discovered an interesting aspect of the audiovisual essay³⁸ (Wicks 2018). At the end of the semester, he conducted a survey in which 15 of 17 students said that they would prefer to show their work to others in the form of an audiovisual essay rather than as a written essay. A willingness to open up to the perception of positive and negative qualities of one's work and the specificity of its interpretation by others is an important aspect of students' professional development³⁹. Liz Greene draws attention to the significance of the development of vulnerability to hurt (Greene 2020). She says that lecturers must ask themselves how to ensure that their students start thinking differently about their work, take risks, and are not afraid of making mistakes or achieving success. The audiovisual essay may be able to help achieve these goals.

In addition to the theoretical value of the audiovisual essay in an educational environment, there is also the everyday task of evaluating students' work. Another important issue is offering clarifications to students themselves on the review process of their work. They need to know what to focus on when completing a task that involves a lot of creative freedom. The psychological aspect also needs to be considered – most often students are worried about their grades because they have such an impact on things like educational scholarship and future employment. In placing a great deal of importance and stringency on an audiovisual task, we can ultimately strip their research of creativity. Miklós Kiss⁴⁰ advises, to a certain degree, ignoring parametrizing factors (Kiss 2020). He says that within the education system, which is ever more focused on grades and calculable results, students work for their grades rather than doing work for the sake of learning.

It is also worth remembering that for some students, this format may be new and they may not have much experience in creating this kind of work. This is why Wicks tells his students that their work will not be assessed based on technical quality (i.e. use of graphics, sound, music, etc.), but rather they will be assessed based on the quality and originality of the main claim, evidence, counterarguments, etc. (Wicks 2018).

A technical introduction to the format of the audiovisual essay is available in the form of the Middlebury initial experience, described by Jason Mittell

³⁸ James Wicks uses audiovisual essays in his class Post-colonial Literature and Film at the University California San Diego.

³⁹ What's also interesting, most of the students referred this format (11 people), despite the fact that it turned out to be more time-consuming (11 people) (Wicks 2018).

⁴⁰ Miklós Kiss runs the course *Arts in Practice: Videographic Criticism* as part of the final year of undergraduate studies at the University of Groningen.

and Christian Keathley (Keathley, Mittell 2019). The creators of these workshops claimed that the process of learning to create audiovisual essays should start from principles such as: ‘Do first, think later’ and ‘formal parameters lead to the discovery of content’. The essence of this approach was to facilitate understanding of the principles of work in practice. They created exercises with strict formal requirements but which can be based on any content of interest to the participants. This contributed to the concept of the research potential of the audiovisual essay, and also the principles of its rhetoric.

If an audiovisual essay is used as additional material in certain disciplines rather than the main subject, then students can be left with the choice of what format they would like to produce their work in. Another option is using an audiovisual essay as an intermediary task rather than a final project⁴¹. We lean towards the second option, as students’ personal choices might be influenced by their lack of knowledge or apprehension in the face of the new format. Also, one of the objectives of learning should be overcoming such obstacles.

One of the authors of the article (Yevhen Vorozheikin) conducted the course *Visual Culture Studies* at the Drahomanov National Pedagogical University (Kyiv, Ukraine). Vorozheikin notes that over several consecutive years, for the final project, he offered students the option to produce either an audiovisual essay or a written essay. He has observed that many students who understood the course’s material well, chose the format they had more experience with. It is also worth mentioning that his course was part of the final year of Master’s degree studies, which, as he presumes, also influenced (their choice). Most students did not want to waste their time on a new, fairly difficult task. Students often have little time during their last courses. Besides their studies, they are busy writing their Master’s dissertations and a considerable part of them already have a full-time job. The situation was different in the context of the course *New media art* for undergraduate students. In 2019, three students, based on their interest in the discussed course material, asked Vorozheikin about the opportunity for performing a more creative type of work. In 2020, also during the course *New media art*, this format took on new significance during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is noteworthy that in this case, Vorozheikin proposed that his students create not an audiovisual essay, but rather a part of its protoform, i.e. a video presentation in the form of a recording of their comments while watching or displaying artists’ works. However, in effect, some students applied a creative approach to the task and supplemented their work with various elements. For example, one student, based on the creative method of one of the media art courses, demonstrated the process of creating her work and described that

⁴¹ For example, Fren offers a choice between formats for the final project but also uses an audiovisual essay as the intermediary task (Fren 2020).

experience. This kind of approach can be very interesting for students and effective in terms of their understanding of educational material.

Kiss believes that students' reflections on the topic of self-description are a key element of assessment. He focuses not on the audiovisual work itself but on the process through which students go when creating their work, and the by means by which they consider the influence these production processes have on them (Kiss 2020). If we perceive the audiovisual essay as a tool that allows students to develop their research skills, then their experience is key information when it comes to understanding this. Greene is a proponent of this principle. She suggests that we take into consideration not only the final audiovisual work but also the merits of the researcher conducting scientific work (Greene 2020). This is why she suggests making Bruce McFarlane's concept of the six characteristics of an ethical researcher a key part of the content of the course module: 'courage, respect, assertiveness, honesty, humility and reflectiveness' (McFarlane 2010). Indeed, we ought to remember who is the key figure in the learning process. We also need to understand that every learning process involves mistakes, and if, for example, a student makes a poor audiovisual essay but succeeded in understanding and identifying the problematic areas of their work, then this deserves a good grade.

It is worth indicating that this kind of approach to learning does not undermine the scientific principles of work. Kiss, despite the creative freedom he affords his students, requires that they demonstrate clear and reflective argumentation regarding the potential value of the entire exercise in their presentations and final projects (Kiss 2020). Greene, however, for work to be recognized as scientific, creates a structure of tasks that includes various research elements, such as analysis, argumentation, and context (Greene 2020). Firstly, her module covers three tasks: a written proposition, an audiovisual essay, and critical reflection. Secondly, each of these tasks requires a specific number of references to academic sources.

3. The Communicative Function of the Audiovisual Essay

There is an area of scientific activity in which the audiovisual essay offers considerable advantages, namely communication.

Above all, the audiovisual essay can function as a way to present research at scientific conferences. The years, conditioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, inescapably led to a need to rethink scientific practice within the context of the new global circumstances. During this period, many universities around the world made various scientific events available online: conferences, workshops, public lectures, and seminars. The closing of borders leads to the realization that internet technologies allow us to overcome distances. However, we have all been reminded that virtual interaction has its

specificities. The in-person conversation is different from a conversation via MS Teams, Zoom, Google Meet⁴², etc. Also, the quality of communication and technical issues became additional aspects of performances (sound quality, video lag, long presentation file download times, etc.). To resolve these issues, some conference organizers suggested that participants record their presentations in advance. Pre-recording a speech solves not only technical problems but also the issue of time, which can in this case be thoroughly adjusted to leave sufficient or even more time for discussion. The format of a recording combined with a presentation is not entirely an audiovisual essay, but it can be an intermediary stage in understanding the benefits of the latter, one of which is the ability to effectively present one's perspective.

The communicative possibilities of the audiovisual essay can be used in terms of presenting it to audiences who speak different languages. And as in the case of movies, this can be done with the help of subtitles. Subtitles allow work to be presented in several languages simultaneously and simplify the process of translation and transfer of the original meaning and nuances, as the audiovisual component remains unchanged in this case. For example, the works *Water Turtles/Tortugas acuáticas* (2019), produced jointly by Catherine Grant and Deborah Martin, can be understood simultaneously by English-speaking and Spanish-speaking audiences. This aspect can be particularly important in the case of works whose language component is important for the representation of ethnic groups. An example of this approach is the audiovisual essay by Jeffrey Middents: *¿Por qué me miras así? Magaly, Dolores and Authentic Indigenous Icon* (2016)⁴³, which explores representations and the perception of indigenous women in Latin-American films. His work is presented in three languages: Spanish, English, and Quechua⁴⁴.

Given that the audiovisual essay works with various materials, mostly created in advance by someone else, it relates to archival work. Michel Foucault defined an archive as a 'discourse system' that provides the opportunity to make statements (Foucault 1972). All knowledge is created within the boundaries and limitations of thoughts that relate to the period in which the aforesaid knowledge is created. Returning to the term 'archive', it refers to that which is kept, is always subjective, and is a mirror image of the concepts and knowledge from the times in which these were discovered. This does not mean that such archives ought to be perceived as separate and isolated from our modern mechanisms for the creation of knowledge. Lauren Berliner notes that when creating an audiovisual essay, it ought to be

⁴² It should be emphasized that all software, in its own way, defines or limits the possibilities of communication

⁴³ <https://vimeo.com/158859028> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

⁴⁴ The song is performed in Quechua; Spanish and English are present on the original soundtracks and in subtitles

remembered which discourses are coded in the source material – the viewer cannot entirely escape from the original artifact, even if the author of the audiovisual essay is attempting to achieve a reversal of such discourses (Berliner 2020).

Most audiovisual essays are published on popular internet platforms. Furthermore, using the direct presentation of material and emotional engagement, the audiovisual essay offers the possibility of facilitating a ‘direct’ form of text analysis and making scientific research available to the general public. It should also be remembered that the openness of form and emotionality can have an inspiring effect through experimentation with the form itself, as with the idea of the content – audiovisual works have often been an effective advertising and propaganda tool. Such communicative options place on the shoulders of authors of audiovisual essays a great deal of responsibility for the content, including concealed content, that they present. This responsibility can be used as an opportunity to review existing archives to change one’s perception of a given discourse or to analyze its political power. Susan Harewood believes that the audiovisual essay ‘can take a scholarly lead in drawing on the feminist, postcolonial, critical race, critical and digital media scholarship that strips ‘the archive’ of any possible claims of disinterested innocence’ (Harewood 2020). A similar approach is already applied in audiovisual essays. For example, in *Cinders of La Invasion* (2017)⁴⁵ Nike Nivar Ortiz questions the link between history and historiography by analyzing the documentary film *Invasion* (Abner Benaim, 2014) about the United States’ invasion of Panama in 1989, which is presented by the U.S. as a campaign to liberate the country. Another example is the work of Miriam Sánchez – *Sangradas/Women bleeds* (2020)⁴⁶. Sánchez analyses varying presentations of several representations of the menstrual cycle in audiovisual works. Following this analysis, she found three types of presentation of menstruation: as taboo, as a source of horror, and as a political statement. The two former are related to popular culture (television and cinema), and the latter with performances by feminist artists.

CONCLUSIONS

In the work analyzed the formal requirements of academic standards that may become an obstacle in the use of audiovisual essays. As a result, it has been shown that many of them are not problematic and can be solved with some trade-offs. The general characteristics of audiovisual essays should not be perceived as a limitation, but as a source of ideas to facilitate the use of this form in academic contexts.

⁴⁵ <https://vimeo.com/233553740> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

⁴⁶ <https://vimeo.com/467680071> (Accessed: 31.05.2020).

The audiovisual essay should not be perceived as a fully-fledged substitute for traditional educational methods – it is an addition that expands the set of teaching tools available and adapts it to the contemporary cultural reality. The audiovisual essay can be effective not only in terms of the presentation of material but also in the development of analytical thinking and research ethics. The latter makes it fulfill the requirements of study assignments in courses and exam works.

The specificity and value of the audiovisual essay lie in the possibility of using the words and other materials to raise important issues and in the way it influences different communities and stimulates the shaping of different points of view contributing to a wide debate on vital topics. Due to this fact, perhaps the key factor in the evaluation of the audiovisual essay as a scientific work should be not necessarily the compatibility of its format with the existing standards, but its influence on the popular science field.

SUMMARY

The first part of the article examines the academic form of an audiovisual essay. The authors update several conceptual issues that are due to the integration of the new phenomenon into the accepted principles of scientific activity, in particular, the adaptation to the existing academic requirements for the registration and publication of the results of scientific activity. Also, the issues of fair use of the existing materials and the possibility to use an audiovisual essay for obtaining an academic degree are analyzed. In the second part of the article, the audiovisual essay is considered as an educational tool. In educational activities, the audiovisual essay is proposed to be used to explain educational materials, the means of developing research skills, an effective tool in the context of online teaching, learning, and providing greater interaction with the content, etc. The article's final part analyzes the audiovisual essay's communicative function. The authors argue that this type of essay should be seen as an effective way of popularizing scientific research, as well as drawing attention to important political, social, and cultural issues.

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