

Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague
Department of Photography

Assessment of the Master's Thesis

Author of thesis: Matthew Colodny

Title of thesis: SPECULATION AND ESTRANGEMENT:
PARALLELS IN THE METHODOLOGIES OF ART AND SCIENCE FICTION

Assessment of the primary advisor

Assessment of the opponent

Author of the assessment (first name, last name, workplace):

Tereza Stejskalová, KF FAMU

Evaluation of the content and final form of the thesis (A/excellent – B/very good – C/good – D/good with objections – E/satisfactory – F/unsatisfactory – not recommended for defence)

Suitability of the selected objective and work approach B.

Relative completeness of the literature used for the selected topic A

Ability to critically evaluate and use professional literature A

Logicity of the thesis structure, connection of its chapters B

Language and stylistic level of the thesis B

Compliance with citation norms (should the text repeatedly contain adopted passages without citing the source, the work cannot be recommended for defence) A

Sufficient extent of image attachments, justifiability and suitability of attachments, graphic layout A

Originality of the thesis, contribution to the development of the field of study A

Overall evaluation of the thesis. A

Verbal evaluation of the thesis including questions that the candidate must address in his/her thesis defence:

Matthew Colodny's thesis deals with science fiction methodologies and practices and how these are negotiated, used and elaborated on by other disciplines, such as contemporary philosophy, theory and art in order to tackle complex political issues we are facing today. Rather than searching for some specific origin or definition of the genre, science fiction and its historical development is introduced through several influential themes, definitions, authors and the debates that have shaped the genre. It is a well-chosen and refreshing approach. Based on that, Colodny defines "estrangement" and "world-building" or, later, "utopianism" and goes on to discuss science fiction echoes found in contemporary theories of accelerationism or speculative realism. The final part deals with the dialogue between science fiction and artistic practice with a focus on the above mentioned strategies of science fiction and how they are put to use in art. It also deals with the ways in which these artworks

further develop those practices (of utopianism, estrangement and world-building) and offer dimension of sensorial experience that literature cannot offer.

Comments, objections and questions:

The thesis is well written, well-structured and thought through. Its well-explained argument is convincing and original. The best part of the work are final chapters devoted to insightful close reading of several artworks that further elaborate on the concepts developed throughout the thesis. It is a pity though that those insights are not adequately tackled and summarized in the conclusion. The weakest part of the thesis are chapters dealing with science fiction's interaction with theory - accelerationism, speculative realism. I have doubts whether it was wise to include those chapters in the thesis. It is not explained why these particular theories are chosen. The descriptions of the theories strike me as rather Wikipedia-like and the use of science-fiction methodologies and practices in those theories is not sufficiently explained. This applies mainly to the part on Accelerationism. I don't think one can just write: "In this way Accelerationism and Science Fiction are inherently linked because they are specifically linked to constant new development (novum) but also with an intense cognition." (30). This is quite a self-evident statement that can be applied to almost every discipline. In case of Speculative Realism, it is interesting that the author chose to deal with echoes of that theory in contemporary science fiction. What kind of echoes of science fiction can one find in speculative realism? Is there anything beyond explicit referencing such as Extro Science Fiction by Meillassoux? Are there methodologies inspired by science fiction used by SR?

The chapters on the history of science fiction deal mainly with the Anglo-Saxon or "Western" tradition. This would be completely fine if the author explained why he decided to tackle that particular tradition. As I find myself in a different context, it strikes me as strange that the author completely omits the rich and vibrant tradition of Eastern European science fiction, particularly the Soviet and Polish authors. (Later on, when you discuss Southern Reach Trilogy by Jeff Vandermeer, the work by Strugatsky brothers and of course Tarkovski's movie Stalker immediately comes to mind.) The same applies to the chapter on utopia and dystopia. Of course, it is fine to discuss what one has immediate access to given one's cultural background. However, I feel one should acknowledge one's situatedness (in Donna Haraway's understanding of the term), show awareness that there are other traditions and explain why one does not discuss them (time and space limits, relevance to the issues discussed or other reasons). Otherwise, one can legitimately criticize the author and the analysis as such over its West-centrism (despite the inclusion of Astronauts).

Date:

Signature:.....