Department of Cinematography

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Final Thesis Evaluation

Author: Nelisa Alcalde

Title: The Cinematography of Rachel Morrison

Evaluation by the Thesis Mentor

Author of Evaluation: Vidu Gunaratna, katedra kamery (Cinematography department)

Evaluation of the content and resulting form of a theoretical Thesis:

Appropriate choice of Thesis objective and approach – B

Relative completeness of the literature search in relation to the topic – A

Ability to adopt a critical approach and use specialised literature sources – C

Logical structure of the Thesis, continuity and proportionality of chapters – D

Linguistic level and style – D

Compliance with the bibliography standards (no thesis may be recommended for defence if there are multiple quote sections indicating no source in the text) – B

Sufficient extent of images, justification for and appropriateness of such images, graphic representation – C

Originality of the Thesis, contribution to the field of interest – C

Overall Evaluation of the Thesis (A-F)

C

(explanation: A = outstanding performance exceeding the criteria above, B = above-average performance with minimum errors, C = average performance with an acceptable level of error, D = acceptable performance with a higher level of error, E = performance merely satisfying the criteria, F = unacceptable performance)

Individual verbal evaluation of the theoretical Thesis:

Cinematography Master degree candidate Nelisa Alcalde chose to explore the cinematography of Rachel Morrison, a respected Hollywood cinematographer with a rich history in documentary and reality TV before embarking for narrative cinema. She made history in 2017 by being the first female cinematographer to win an Oscar nomination for Best cinematography (Mudbound, dir. by Dee Rees, 2017). Not surprisingly, the author shows admiration and deep respect to Morrison's work throughout the thesis.

A brief introduction to the history of women behind the camera and a short biography of Rachel Morrison makes a prelude to the exploration of her cinematic style. The author then offers some perspective on the terms "style", "subjectivism" and "naturalism".

The thesis gravitates around a term Morrison herself coined – "Subjective naturalism", which is supposed to best describe the style of her cinematography. The main source of information on the subject is Rachel Morrison herself, as Nelisa conducted several Zoom interviews with her to discuss her professional and personal life and how Morrison crafted her style and term "Subjective naturalism". Beside the interviews, the author analysed some of Morrison's better-known films to explain subjective naturalism. In Morrison's own words: "I've started to coin the term 'subjective naturalism' for my style. I believe in authenticity but that you can exaggerate things as the stakes get raised. For instance a particularly dramatic scene justifies more high contrast lighting..."

However, the centre point of the thesis is also it's weak point. The author's respect and admiration of Morrison's work kept her from being more critical about the term itself. One can easily argue that all what has been said about subjective naturalism is what good narrative cinematography is about – creating images that cause an emotional response in the audience and ultimately help tell a story. What else is lighting a scene with more contrast than in reality (while keeping the lighting logic) when the dramatic situation of the story requires it? What does an unusual, or extreme camera angle do besides change the perspective of the situation or throwing the audience in the shoes of a character? Is this not storytelling with the camera? Is there a need a for a new term? I miss that critical curiosity and questioning in the thesis.

The thesis would benefit from more attention in editing. There are many instances, when the text repeats itself in a single sentence as well as over a whole paragraph, making it unnecessarily long and harder to read. On a larger scale, editing would help clarity of the writing, which is not always focused and often burdened by anticipations of other topics further in the text.

Despite the shortcomings, the thesis meets the required standards and I recommend it for defence, and propose it to be graded C.

Date: 25. 9. 2021   Signature: ....