

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

Assessment of the Master's Thesis

Author of thesis: Xiang Yu

Title of thesis: What Does Today's Image Record. Analysis of documentary photography in the Digital and We Media Age

Assessment of the primary advisor ☐

Assessment of the opponent ✓

Author of the assessment (first name, last name, workplace): Michal Šimůnek,
University of Economics, Prague

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.....D
Relative completeness of the literature used for the selected topic.....E
Ability to critically evaluate and use professional literature.....E
Logicity of the thesis structure, connection of its chapters.....E
Language and stylistic level of the thesis.....E
Compliance with citation norms (should the text repeatedly contain adopted passages without citing the source, the work cannot be recommended for defence).....D
Sufficient extent of image attachments, justifiability and suitability of attachments, graphic layout.....D
Originality of the thesis, contribution to the development of the field of study.....E

Overall evaluation of the thesis.....E

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

Reading the title and abstract of Xiang Yu's thesis one could expect a treatise on the changing conception of documentary photography and photographic practice in contemporary digital culture and new media environment. Although I do not doubt the author diligently attempted to accomplish this ambitious objective, I consider his thesis as only partially successful assessment of the role of digital technologies in post-documentary transformations of documentary photography. My objections are as follows:

- The structure of argumentation is mostly incoherent and unfocussed. Instead of focussing on the consequences of digital revolution on documentary photography the author repeatedly and vaguely discusses the nature of photographic images.
- The chapter "Literature review" is not a literature review at all. The chapter "Methodology" (containing only 6 words!) could not be considered as a chapter, much less as a methodological chapter. In fact, none of these two

chapters is necessarily required in theoretical texts: for example, literature review is usually continuously elaborated in the process of argumentation.

- I miss more examples of contemporary/digital post-documentary photography practices, some significant post-documentary practices are mentioned vaguely or are not mentioned at all (civic/public journalism, interactive documentaries etc.). There is no detailed description and analysis of the role of digital technologies (new media) in the post-documentary photography practices.
- The thesis is not written in academic style: the argumentation is not supported by satisfactory number of relevant literature; the author repeatedly and vaguely deals with classics (W. Benjamin, S. Sontag, R. Barthes,...), instead of discussing basic literature on the subject; the required formal standards are not used (there is no pagination, notes and illustrations are chaotically referenced, many quotations are not referenced at all, there is no name/subject index, references are mixed up with bibliography,...). The thesis deserves substantial proofreading and editing: some sentences hardly make sense, there are a lot of typos, terminological inaccuracies and translation mistakes (e.g. French “ça a été” – R. Barthes, Camera Lucida – is translated as “that has been”).

Despite all the upper mentioned weaknesses I consider Xiang Yu's thesis as acceptable for the defence as several parts of his thesis (especially those examples taken from Chinese cultural settings) indicate that the author is acquainted with contemporary post-documentary practices. I propose the thesis to be classified by the grade E.

Questions for the defence:

In what sense could the basic characteristics of digital (new, *we*, participatory) media (see e.g. Lister, M. (Ed.), 2009. *New media: a critical introduction*, 2nd ed. ed. Routledge, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, N.Y.) stimulate and strengthen the post-documentary tendencies in photography?



Date: 15/05/2017

Signature:.....