

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Social Sciences
Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

MA THESIS REVIEW

NOTE: Only the grey fields should be filled out!

Review type (choose one):

Review by thesis supervisor Review by opponent

Thesis author:

Surname and given name: Novaes Buffa Fernanda

Thesis title: How The New Yorker portrays immigrant families in its documentary films

Reviewer:

Surname and given name: František Géla

Affiliation: KŽ IKSŽ FSV UK

1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND THESIS (mark one box for each row)

		Conforms to approved research proposal	Changes are well explained and appropriate	Changes are explained but are inappropriate	Changes are not explained and are inappropriate	Does not conform to approved research proposal
1.1	Research objective(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Methodology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3	Thesis structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

COMMENTARY (description of the relationship between the research proposal and the thesis. If there are problems, please be specific):

The changes are specified in the introduction chapter.

2. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS CONTENT

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
2.1	Quality and appropriateness of the theoretical framework	A
2.2	Ability to critically evaluate and apply the literature	B
2.3	Quality and soundness of the empirical research	C
2.4	Ability to select the appropriate methods and to use them correctly	B
2.5	Quality of the conclusion	C
2.6	Thesis originality and its contribution to academic knowledge production	B

COMMENTARY (description of thesis content and the main problems):

The thesis focuses on mis-en-scènes of shots and scenes portraying migrant families in documentaries on The New Yorker (TNY) website. It is a question of whether the selected medium is the right and relevant choice (I am missing more precise arguments for selecting TNY) and whether the method focusing on specific (mainly) technical codes is the right approach.

The thesis has a high-quality theoretical framework that uses relevant and up-to-date literature. The author covered all the areas relevant to the research topic in the literature review chapters. The most relevant part about mis-en-scène "borrows" theoretical background from the film studies.

The methodology chapter describes the process of selection of the researched films in detail, including the methods used. The empirical part is done quite technically. The author chooses certain scenes from the short films and analysis selected elements of the scene (e.g., lighting, set design, composition, etc.). I am skeptical about some of the examined categories in non-fiction documentary films. As a reviewer with a professional background partly in filmmaking and TV production, I can see some problematic parts which can have some connotations described in theory. However, especially in non-fiction work (including documentary and

journalistic production), it is a matter of practical utilization of available space and equipment (depth of field, focal length, lighting, set design, etc.). There are no set designers, gaffers and other crew members who would be in charge of specific parts of mis-en-scène in a fiction film, advertisement etc. There is also a misunderstanding in the lighting categories. Low-key and high-key are specific lighting techniques (usually, but not exceptionally when artificial light is used) using opposite "extreme" light atmospheres. There should be some neutral lighting category. For example, examined shots from the first film (p. 50-51) do not use low-key lighting - those shots were shot in a slightly darker environment, but the lighting is generally neutral. Declared high-key lighting in the third shot is neutral lighting as well.

Using the selected method, the analysis is very descriptive, and some audience-targetted approaches that the author mentions in the discussion (focus group?) would be more helpful in the research of the effects of documentary production - e.g., what is the impact of those documentaries or what is the effect of specific mis-en-scène on the audience.

The author answers the research question. However, she focused more on the formalistic visual properties of the specific shots portraying a family. I would appreciate a deeper interpretation of the results - what does it mean when the specific setting is used, what is the impact of that.

3. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS FORM

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
3.1	Quality of the structure	B
3.2	Quality of the argumentation	B
3.3	Appropriate use of academic terminology	A
3.4	Quality, quantity and appropriateness of the citations (both in the theory part and in the empirical part)	A
3.5	Conformity to quotation standards (*)	A
3.6	Use of an academic writing style, and correct use of language (both grammar and spelling)	A
3.6	Quality of the textual lay-outing and appendices	B

(*) in case the text contains quotations without references, the grade is F; in case the text contains plagiarised parts, do not recommend the thesis for defence and suggest disciplinary action against the author instead.

COMMENTARY (description of thesis form and the main problems):

The manuscript has a logical structure of an academic text. There are some minor typographic errors - such as text-align (e.g. - p. 17), titles or/and first paragraphs in the bottom of a page (e.g. - p. 15, 90), footnotes format. Graphs and tables are used for the data presentation in the empirical part.

4. OVERAL EVALUATION (provide a summarizing list of the thesis's strengths and weaknesses):

Despite all my remarks, I think the thesis is a quality piece of academic text. This Master's thesis has a high-quality theoretical part. The execution of the empirical part also has a good quality. However, I wonder about the core subject of interest and used method. It is evident that the selected topic is the author's personal point of interest, but from the global point of view, it may appear as "research for research". I suggest grading the thesis B or C depending on the defense.

5. QUESTIONS OR TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THE THESIS DEFENSE:

5.1	Why have you chosen films presented by The New Yorker? Have you thought about something else?
5.2	What do you think is the role of mise-en-scène, especially set design in documentary and other non-fiction production?
5.3	
5.4	

6. ANTIPLAGIARISM CHECK

The reviewer is familiar with the thesis' antiplagiarism system score.

If the score is above 5%, please evaluate and indicate problems:

6.1	
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7. SUGGESTED GRADE OF THE THESIS AS A WHOLE (choose one or two)

- A** excellent
- B** very good (above average but with some weaknesses)
- C** good (average with some important weaknesses)
- D** satisfactory (below average with significant weaknesses)
- E** marginal pass (meeting minimal requirements)
- F** not recommended for defence

If the mark is an “F”, please provide your reasons for not recommending the thesis for defence:

Date:

Signature:

A finalised review should be printed, signed and submitted in two copies to the secretary of the Department of Media Studies. The electronic version of the review should be converted into a PDF and uploaded to SIS, or sent to the Department of Media Studies secretary who will upload it to SIS on the reviewer’s behalf.

Do not upload PDFs with a scanned signature, the review uploaded to SIS must be without signature.