



Universität Regensburg

DZIEKANAT
Wydziału Historycznego UJ
wpłynęło..... 13.09.2023

FAKULTÄT FÜR PHILOSOPHIE,
KUNST-, GESCHICHTS- UND GESELLSCHAFTSWISSENSCHAFTEN

FAKULTÄT FÜR SPRACH-, LITERATUR-
UND KULTURWISSENSCHAFTEN

Universität Regensburg · 93040 Regensburg

Office of the Dean
Faculty of History
Jagiellonian University
24 Gołębia Street, 31-007 Kraków
Poland

DIMAS

Department für Interdisziplinäre und Multiskalare Area
Studies

Prof. Dr. Astrid Ensslin

Professor of Digital Cultures and Communication |
Professorin für Dynamiken virtueller
Kommunikationsräume

Fakultät für Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften

astrid.ensslin@ur.de

DIMAS

0941 943-5964

dimas.office@ur.de

www.uni-regensburg.de/citas/dimas

Regensburg, 8th September 2023

Dear Dean Sroka, dear Professor Loska, dear doctoral evaluation committee,

It is my honour to provide this review of Mr Filip Jankowski's doctoral thesis, titled "Digital Games and the Category of Auteur: An Intersectional Approach". I have read and reviewed the manuscript in detail and evaluated it in accordance with the three criteria outlined in your earlier correspondence. In what follows, I will address these criteria consecutively.

- 1) An assessment with justification as to whether the doctoral dissertation presents the general theoretical knowledge of the person applying for a doctoral degree in a specific discipline or disciplines:
 - The dissertation shows extensive theoretical knowledge of game studies and auteur studies, and it there is no doubt in my mind that the applicant has profuse expertise and play experience in the games under investigation and beyond. The thesis also shows extensive awareness of theories of intersectionality. However, some of the language used throughout casts doubt on the author's understanding of key concepts of gender studies, such as biological sex, gender and sexual preference. The consistent use of "female/s", including in contexts where "women" or "woman-identifying individuals" are being referred to concerns me.
 - I am also not convinced by the applicant's application of my theory and method of ludostylistics. Here and in many other places of the thesis, technical terms are underexplained and adopted uncritically, without reflection or discussion, which are key

in doctoral-level writing. Ludostylistics is actually showcased in the book he quotes in terms of extensive close analyses of individual works (one per chapter). By contrast, in the dissertation an attempt is made to cover as many games as possible, which is ambitious and fails to demonstrate detailed understanding of the concepts at work.

- The author's intersectional lens is left underdeveloped and somewhat inconsequential in the analysis of the games and his auteur concept. It does not become clear from the analysis and discussion of the games and their makers how exactly intersectionality needs to be applied and/or refigured to function as a workable framework for auteur studies. I also missed engagement with aesthetic aspects of auteurship, which are absolutely key especially in film auteurship.
 - Generally speaking, many key terms and concepts are taken for granted and left underexplained. Prominent examples include "nomadic subjects", "desexualized bodies", "métissage", "propination coercion", and "Marxist ontology". "Indigenous" is inconsistently spelled either with upper or lower case, which is non-trivial in this particular case.
 - Other terms used are highly problematic yet aren't problematized, such as "orientalization" (p.170) and "Occidental colonial texts" (p.17),
- 2) An assessment with justification as to whether the doctoral dissertation demonstrates the ability of the person applying for a doctoral degree to conduct scientific or artistic work independently;
- There is no doubt that the applicant conducted this project independently. He combines his material into an innovative combination of auteur studies, intersectionality and ludostylistics.
 - That said, this strength can also be seen as a weakness. I wonder whether the thesis would have benefited from stronger intervention from his doctoral committee because its results are poorly woven together, with hardly any Discussion or Conclusion to speak of, and the reader is left with more questions than answers at the end of the reading experience.
 - This issue is most strongly visible in the applicant's failure to prove the validity of his own theory of digital game auteurs. His model on p.73 is not taken up again in a final, detailed and balanced discussion that would flesh out the degree and the ways in which his chosen case studies meet and/or deviate the individual fields in the table. I'm also highly uncertain of the term "shy decision maker" for any women or non-binary individual in the games industry. The term "shy" certainly does not match the leadership qualities of Jayanth and presents her in an almost dismissive light.
 - It is not clear to me why the candidate's methodology draws so heavily on game reviews. Are they an integral part of auteur analysis? Aren't they heavily biased and non-peer-reviewed? Can auteurs only be auteurs when they receive glowing journalistic reviews? This is not explained in sufficient depth, and certainly isn't part of ludostylistics as devised in *The Language of Gaming*.

3) An assessment with justification as to whether the doctoral dissertation constitutes an original solution to a scientific problem, an original solution for the application of the results of own scientific research in the economic or social sphere, or an original artistic achievement.

- The scientific problem, if I've understood it correctly, was to develop an intersectional auteur theory for digital (indie) game makers. This is an important undertaking that is long overdue, and the applicant is in a good position to do so given his expertise and track record. However, the thesis as it stands does not present a convincing, original solution for the application of the results. The analyses need to be carefully mapped onto the author's conceptual tools and fleshed out into a full-fledged theory of digital, intersectional game auteurship that goes beyond individual case studies. To merit a doctoral degree, a thesis should synthesize its findings into a bigger and meaningful whole that will benefit – in this case – both game studies and gender studies.

I would like to add that I found the thesis to be poorly proofread in places. It struck me that it does not show a consistent approach to translating non-English quotations, which slows down the pace of reading and impedes understanding. The overall impression I obtained was that the manuscript was put together in a rush. In my experience, doctoral dissertations tend to be about 100 pages longer than that presented by Mr Jankowski, and whilst I would never prioritize quantity over quality, in this particular case there is a clear lack of critical and in-depth engagement with some of the theories at the core of the argument (e.g. ludostylistics), and the thesis lacks an independent synthesis of analytical results, independent theory-crafting and contextualization of the findings with existing research.

For these reasons, I am afraid I cannot recommend that a doctoral degree be awarded at this time. In a different academic system like the North American or British one (which I am familiar with), I would recommend substantive revisions and resubmission.

Respectfully,



Prof. Dr. Astrid Ensslin

