

TYPES OF THESES

How to balance Creative and Critical Components in your Thesis

Integrating Critical and Creative Processes

Your thesis project should ideally integrate creativity and criticality. That is, your creative process should emerge from having critically engaged literature and films related to your topic, and your critical process should emerge in part from the production of creative work. This merging of creative and critical processes can take ANY ONE of three forms:

- A. Primarily Critical with Complementary Creative Component
- B. Primarily Creative with Complementary Critical Component
- C. Balanced Integration of Critical and Creative Components

Below, you will find some guidelines for each thesis form. These are by no means the only options for a student thesis. Your project will be one that you shape in consultation with your primary and secondary advisor.

A) Primarily Critical Thesis

The critical thesis is primarily a research-oriented written project. The critical portion of the thesis may be a series of interlinked chapters (with intro and conclusion) that examine a body of works, historical or cultural movement, or genre (with textual analysis, theoretical framework, and historical contextualization or primary historical research). The creative component may be a curated program of screenings that represent a cycle of media texts the critical work defines, or it could be a short film that further explores the topic or issues raised in the critical work in some form.

A typical critical component is about 60 pages in length, with 2-3 Chapters of 15-20 pages each + an Introduction (7-10 pages), and Conclusion (2-5 pages). Another possibility is 15 page Introduction + Two 15-20 page chapters, and a 5-7 page conclusion.

If the creative component is a film, it should be no longer than 7 minutes. The duration and scope of a different form of creative component (eg: a plan for an installation or curated program) should be of comparable ambition to this length of film, and should be decided in consultation with your advisor.

B) Primarily Creative Thesis

The creative thesis is primarily an audiovisual project, installation, or screenplay (for whatever form you choose, you must have completed prior coursework in that form).

A typical thesis film is at maximum 20-25 minutes. (Quality is more important than quantity. This is *not* a feature film.) The duration and scope of a different form of creative component (eg: an installation or screenplay) should be of comparable ambition to this length of film, and should be decided in consultation with your advisor.

The complementary critical component of the thesis should be around 15 pages. The point of this component is to critically analyze your creative project in relation to critical texts and other

films that have informed your own. Someone reading this component should not feel that it has no relation to your film; it should demonstrate how your creative process has emerged from grappling with the critical issues you deal with in this component.

This critical component can take a number of different forms. The only rule is that it *should not* be an “artist statement,” or an autobiographical account of how you made your film. Here are some possible models for the form of your written component:

1. A critical analysis of your film’s process or form in relation to critical works
2. A critical examination of the main concept(s) you’re using, through an exploration of their theoretical lineage (eg: theories of lineage, epistolary films)
3. A treatise on the historical and cultural context of your film’s topic or form
4. A critical analysis of a contemporary or historical event, issue, or debate with which your film grapples

C) Balanced Thesis

A balanced project will shape critical and creative components equally (in effort, most certainly, and also in design). This particular kind of project — while ideal for the major — demands careful development with your advisor, but here are some basic models for this approach. For one, the very form of the project (as a digital object, website, or immersive space, for instance) might demonstrate the “creative” element of the thesis, whereas its content represents the critical component. As another possibility, you may develop an extensive curated program, series, or site-specific installation that includes historical and archival research, a theoretical and conceptual framework, and carefully constructed program notes.

The duration, length, and scope of the integrated elements of such a thesis should be designed as a median between those of a primarily critical thesis (60 pages) and a primarily creative thesis (a 20-25 minute film), in consultation with your advisor. You should by no means do both in equal length!