

VIDEO ESSAYS AS PHILOSOPHY

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Dedication

I dedicate this monograph to my parents, José Orlando and Amelia. Their curiosity, love for truth and joyful pursuit of knowledge, exposed me to the bliss of learning.

Resumen

En esta monografía se proponen los video ensayos como herramienta para la producción, divulgación y enseñanza de la filosofía. En un primer momento, se definen los video ensayos como formato de producción audiovisual de carácter e intención argumentativas. Como tales, permiten examinar, explorar y formar las opiniones propias del creador sobre algún tema específico. Posteriormente se ejemplifica esta definición haciendo un estudio de caso de tres video ensayos, analizados con un método desarrollado para este trabajo a partir de los criterios para la evaluación de producciones de video arte que propone González (2010). Por último, se muestra que las características del video ensayo, tal como se define antes, lo convierten en una herramienta con alto potencial didáctico en la pedagogía de la filosofía desde el paradigma de educación para la democracia. Esto se debe a que cumplen el rol doble que Martha Nussbaum (2010) asigna a las artes y las humanidades, el abordaje de temas culturales problemáticos y el desarrollo de las habilidades de pensamiento crítico, visión de mundo cosmopolita e imaginación para la empatía.

Palabras clave: video ensayo, pedagogía, filosofía, educación para la democracia.

Abstract

In this monograph, it is proposed that video essays are tools for the production, divulgation and teaching of philosophy. First, video essays are defined as audiovisual productions of argumentative character and intention. As such, they allow the examination, exploration and construction of the creator's beliefs on a specific matter. Afterwards, the definition is exemplified with a case study of three video essays, examined with a method developed for this investigation and based upon the criteria for evaluation of video art productions posited by González-Hidalgo (2010). At last, it is shown that the characteristics of the video essay, as previously defined, turn it into a tool with a considerable didactical potential in the field of pedagogy of philosophy within the paradigm of education for democracy. Video essays fulfill the twofold role that Martha Nussbaum bestows on arts and humanities (2010): addressing cultural blindspots and the development of the abilities for critical thinking, a cosmopolitan worldview and imagination for sympathy.

Keywords: video essay, pedagogy, philosophy, education for democracy.

Contents

VIDEO ESSAYS AS PHILOSOPHY	1
Video Essays As Philosophy	2
Dedication	3
I dedicate this monograph to my parents, Amelia and Orlando. Their love for knowledge and integrity towards truth exposed me to the bliss of learning.	3
Resumen	4
Abstract	5
Contents	6
List of tables	8
Introduction	9
Chapter 1. The video essay	13
1.1. Concept	13
1.2. From the written to the audiovisual: the video essay as argumentative production	13
1.3. Characteristics of video essays	19
Chapter 2. Case study	22
2.1. Philosophy Tube	23
Table 1. Correspondence between the argumentative and expressive dimensions in Brexit: What Is Democracy?	26
2.2. Quetzal	29
Table 2. Correspondence between the argumentative and expressive dimensions in El marxismo cultural no existe (Quetzal, 2019):	30
2.3. Contrapoints:	32
Table 3: Correspondence between the argumentative and expressive dimensions in the video Opulence (Wynn, 2018):	34
2.4. Conclusion	37
Chapter 3. Pedagogical discussion	38
3.1. The crisis in humanities and the endangered democratic citizen	39
3.2. Where is philosophy in all this?	43
3.3. On the consumption of video essays	46
3.4. On the creation of video essays	57
Conclusions	63

References	66
Filmic references	70

List of tables

Table 1. Correspondence between the argumentative and expressive dimensions in the video *Brexit: What Is Democracy?*

31

Table 2. Correspondence between the argumentative and expressive dimensions in the video *El marxismo cultural no existe* (Quetzal, 2019):

34

Table 3: Correspondence between the argumentative and expressive dimensions in the video *Opulence* (Wynn, 2018):

37

Introduction

In 2018, Natalia Estefany González Gil presented her thesis *Creación de Cine Ensayístico desde la Filosofía como Forma de Vida*, with which she licenced in philosophy from the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de Colombia. There, she presents film as a means for philosophical practice, a spiritual exercise on the hard question of ethics: How shall I live? Although González makes no use of the term “video essay” in her thesis, she does write *ensayo audiovisual* and *cine-ensayo*, which is close enough. It is also worth noting that González has undertaken a filmmaking career alongside her philosophical one, with her YouTube channel *Natagaima* having a playlist called *video-ensayo* [video-essay]. There is also *El video-ensayo filosófico*, a talk presented by me on November 22nd 2019, at the first *Festival Internacional de Filosofía* of the Universidad de Caldas, Manizales¹. There lies the seed that will later spark into this investigation, and it follows the basic structure of a quick sketch of a definition and three examples of philosopher youtubers.

In the Spanish speaking world, the term *ensayo audiovisual* seems to be more used than *video ensayo*. Literature on the potential uses of audiovisual essays is almost exclusively limited to the field of arts, most of them from Spanish or Spain-based authors. In that order, there are works such as the ones from García-Roldán (2012, 2020) and Arcoba (2020). Whereas the first author focuses on a conceptualization of the video essay as artistic format and and method for investigation-creation, the latter explored the didactical possibilities it offers in a highschool art class, as means to familiarize students with contemporary forms of creation and a way to aid in the construction of personal identity.

An instance of the first official use of the termn “video essay” was not found. Nonetheless, Biemann and contributors used it already in 2003 when publishing *Stuff it: The video essay in the digital age*, the memoirs from a congress they held a year before to discuss and acknowledge video essays. This means that the word must have been floating around in art scenes throughout Europe and the USA since, at least, 2001 or 2002. Another early mention that

¹ The talk is available on the Youtube channel of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities from the Universidad de Caldas. I share here the link: [El video-ensayo filosófico - Joam David Gil Bermúdez](#).

was found is the article *On the origin of the Video Essay*, written by professor John Bresland in 2010 for *Blackbird*, an online magazine devoted to arts and film. Bresland too attempted a definition of the video essay with his article. Results of a search in Google of the word “video essay” lead to a multitude of online newspapers and magazines, mostly articles from 2015 and subsequent years that try, as well, to sketch a definition of this kind of content. Most of them are quite short and dedicated to videos about films, others are interviews with some creators or just lists of creators and how to access their content. Needless to say, there is also a certain number of Youtube videos of creators accounting for their craft.

All of these serves to illustrate how most of the literature revised for this monograph comes originally from the fields of art studies, pedagogy of arts and film and essay theory. Therefore, all concepts and proposals drawn from these sources have had to be adapted to fit the case of philosophy.

This work takes on two major questions. First, it elaborates on what video essays are and how they can be used to tackle philosophical production, education and divulgation. Secondly, it argues that video essays, thusly constructed, can serve as pedagogical tools from the standpoint of the education for democracy, proposed by Nussbaum (2010). With that in mind, the first chapter presents a definition of the video essay and lists some of the characteristics resulting from this definition. The second chapter consists of a case study of three video essays from successful philosopher youtubers in order to showcase the characteristics proposed in the previous chapter. This second chapter also presents a method for analysis of audiovisual productions, based on the evaluation criteria for video art designed by professor González (2010). Finally, the third chapter links the video essay to the three abilities for democracy presented by Martha Nussbaum in her book *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities?*. The abilities for critical thought, cosmopolitan worldview and sympathetic imagination can be exercised through the creation or consumption of video essays, depending mostly on what content is given to them. It is important to highlight that the characteristics outlined at the end of chapter 1 are formal, i.e., they themselves will not suffice to develop democratic education activities, as this requires a specific content to be given to this form, which

implies an intention from the teacher and or creator at the time of using video essays in their classes. The third chapter begins with an overview of the crisis in humanities and philosophy's place in it. Then, it revisits the three videos analyzed in the second chapter and, using the concepts they offer to develop a brief reflection in accordance with the abilities for democracy. Lastly, four conceptions of the video essay are examined. These conceptions fall in line with Nussbaum's idea of an education for democracy, showing once again, how video essays can be a didactical tool in the teaching of philosophy, following the paradigm of education for democracy.

- Video Essay.
- Pedagogy
- Philosophy.
- Crisis of humanities.

Problem:

How can video essays be used in philosophy education so that they serve to ameliorate the crisis in humanities?

Objectives:

General: Propose the video essay as a pedagogical tool for the practice, teaching and divulgation of philosophy, in relation to the crisis of humanities as a background scenario.

Specific:

- Define the video essay as an argumentative audiovisual product suitable for philosophical practice and divulgation.
- Examine three Youtube videos from channels that produce philosophical video essays as case studies of this format.
- Link different approaches to the making of video essays to the abilities for democratic life proposed by Nussbaum.

Methodology:

Following Maldonado (2018), this work uses a qualitative approach for this investigation, particularly, the bibliographic and case study methods, because this investigation is both exploratory and descriptive. Nevertheless, and given the overlapping nature of philosophical inquiry, the socio-critical paradigm also suits the motives behind this research. For the first chapter, recent literature on the subjects of video art, essay film, video essays and the relationship between philosophy and the audiovisual media is revised, which aims to build a definition of video essays and link them to the practice of philosophy. The second chapter will be a case study of three Youtube channels: Philosophy Tube, Contrapoints and Quetzal; showcasing how the videos found in those satisfy the definition previously given. The strategy then is to select one video from each of these channels and examine them, looking for the characteristics outlined in the first chapter. The third chapter contains the bulk of the argumentation. Aimed to analyze the relationship between video essays, the crisis of the humanities and the pedagogy of philosophy, the third chapter reviews and discusses literature on the subject and critiques four conceptions of the video essay from the standpoint of education for democracy.

Chapter 1. The video essay

1.1. Concept

This chapter provides a definition of video essays and a list of their general characteristics. This is achieved by following literature on the topic and a number of reflections by video essayists regarding their own craft. By the end of the chapter, video essays will be understood as a short or mid duration audiovisual productions (generally under 50 minutes) of argumentative character; i. e., a mixture of filmic and narrative elements (footage, photography, sound and silence, narration, text, etc.) organized with the structure of a written essay. This definition might clash with other descriptions of the video essay and essayistic films (see García-Roldán, 2020; González, 2018; Lopate, 1995), specially those that do not emphasize the communion between the written and the audiovisual essay, thus portraying these productions much more flexibly and artistically than this monograph. Another highlight of this chapter is that it lays the groundwork for a method for analyzing audiovisual productions by adapting the tools proposed by professor González (2010) for a standardized evaluation of video-art. More importantly, the method for the analysis of audiovisual productions will be used in the case study of the second chapter. Considering the above, this chapter reads more as an informative rather than an argumentative text. The core pillars for this section are González (2010), Biemann (2003), Bresland (2010) and Lukács (2005-2006).

1.2. From the written to the audiovisual: the video essay as argumentative production

The video essay is a short or mid duration audiovisual production (generally ranging from 8 to 50 minutes, however, longer and shorter ones exist) of argumentative character. It can be used to defend a claim, in which case they can be labeled “affirmative” or “propositive”, but also invite discussion about a certain topic in a more general attitude, these can be referred to as “exploratory” video essays. In video essays, there is a mixture of visual, digital, theatrical and sound elements under the all familiar structure of a written essay: they possess an introduction that presents the thesis to defend and sets the general tone and parts of the text, a body or core, where the discussion is held through various types of arguments, counter arguments and examples, and a conclusion, which reaffirms the thesis previously presented by summarizing the

most important arguments in the discussion and how they validate the thesis. In the conclusion can also be found, but not necessarily, questions to further the inquiry in future texts by the same author or different investigators.

Evidently, the video essay is not a solely philosophical format. In fact, philosophical video essays were among the last to appear in public, being preceded by video art and film-essays, but coexisting and overlapping with these categories (Biemann, 2003; Bresland 2010). Video essays seem to cover a need for educational content, albeit a quick and easy-to-chew one, or at the very least, to satisfy the curiosity of the public for fun facts and general culture. They all display the same affable, informal and fun tone found in video blogs, but with an informative rigour closer to an academic lecture or textbook. This rigour, of course, varies depending on the craft and resourcefulness of the creator, the tools at their disposal and the care and intentions they put into the video. Nevertheless, in order to gain a better understanding of the definition just presented, it is necessary to step back and examine how written essays can be translated into the audiovisual media.

There is a simple but flexible structure that has become synonymous with essays themselves². First, there is an *introduction*, where the reader is given the context of the discussion, information important to it and the thesis they hopefully will be persuaded of. Then the reader is provided with the arguments with which it is intended to convince them of the author's position, this is the *body* or *core* of the essay. At last, a summary of the more important aspects of the discussion is presented, *concluding* that there are sufficient reasons to consider the proposed opinion as valid and justified. This structure is so undoubtedly accepted that schools and universities teach it to their students as a formula for writing quality argumentative texts (Abrahams, 2000; Angulo Marcial, 2013; Centro de Escritura Javeriano, 2018).

² Academic papers do tend to have this structure, nonetheless, they also seem to have more of an informative intention, as many of them are reports on the results or the state of an investigation; with this intention being best suitable for quantitative investigations in natural and applied sciences. Papers in humanities or philosophy disciplines are argumentative in nature, but they are produced by experts for experts, which would set them apart from essays in general. Another characteristic that differentiates them from essays is the impersonal tone, especially being written in a third person neutral voice, as opposed to the first person of the essay.

In its core, an essay is a personal exercise on thinking. People write essays to give a physical substance to a train of thought on a matter that concerns them. Both Lukács (2005-2006) and Adorno (1991) agree that the essay is a form of knowledge-productive discourse that opposes the rigour required for scientific investigations, given its focus on the unbound discursive, knot-like, flow of thought. Furthermore, Montaigne himself, undisputed creator of the Western essay, warns his readers that he is presenting nothing more than his own personal convictions (Montaigne, 2019, p.39), the thoughts he has had while reflecting upon whatever he deemed worthy of examination. From this follows that essays could not be more intimate in their place of enunciation, for they start from personal concerns and observations on day to day experiences (González Gil, 2018, p.34). Therefore, the main purpose of an essay is for one to gain clarity on the understanding one has on a subject. Nevertheless, essays strive for universality -whether or not they achieve it is a question not to be addressed here- and objective validity, so it transcends mere subjective belief. Not only does the author want to gain clarity on their understanding of something, in doing so, they record their thought process for getting there, the examination of their and other's beliefs on the subject at hand to test their validity. Essayists want to know what they think of something and why, so that others can follow that process as well.

The latter signals, for some (Adorno 1991, p.21; Lukács 2005-2006, p.241; Picazo, 2019, pp.20-21), that essays serve the purpose of giving sense to life, to the way in which the essayist relates to their day to day experiences. Writing an essay can be considered a process of reflexive introspection, which results both in knowledge and self-knowledge with ethical effects over the way the writer conducts themselves through life. This would make essays mostly aporetic texts (Lukács, 2005-2006, p.238), unending loops that can be re-entered at any future moment, seeking no particular end other than their own process of speculative examination and rectification. The conclusions to which the essay comes can always be revised, concepts can always -and often are- reexamined, abandoned or redefined. And essayists achieve all this with a discursive, non-linear structure, binding together heterogeneous elements with no necessary or intrinsic relation to each other: references to images, personal experiences, historical events, feelings, other opinions, certain knowledge, and so on; this feature will later appear in the video

essay as *use of the absurd*, term taken from Biemann (2003). In an essay, authors quote different sources or authorities on the matter, they confront points and arguments contrary to theirs, cite examples of cases that can have no real connection to the claim being made or the sources referenced. It can be said that different tools are used for the production of written essays, even though they are not inexcusably necessary. An essay constantly moves from one of these elements to the next, going back and forth in what has been said, found, denied or heard, gaining deeper insights each time.

Now, according to professor Carlos González Hidalgo (2010), all audiovisual productions are but messages for communication. As such, they have three dimensions under which their elements are classified: the argumentative, the expressive and the technical. The first one englobes all conceptual content and the intention with which the piece is produced, the second refers to those formal elements that make up the backbone of the production's structure, and the third is composed by the technology and artifacts required to make the product (cameras, microphones, formats of sound, image and video, software for edition, special effects techniques, etc.). González initially developed these concepts as criteria for the evaluation, assessment and grading of the audiovisual projects of his classes. They will be used here to show the philosophical weight of video essays. Due to that, the study focuses almost exclusively on the first two dimensions, the argumentative and the expressive.

González tells us that the argumentative dimension “determines the *sense* of the audiovisual proposal by means of the *concept* and *use* that the transmitter can and wants to give to the message” (2010, p.73. Translated from Spanish). In that sense, the argumentative dimension is where all semantic and pragmatic elements of the video are. The former deals with the relations established between the concepts used in the video, while the latter refers to the intention the creator has for making it. Videos completely grounded in reality or totally fictional and fantastic can be composed, as can be others telling experiences, informing about events or developing an argument. Sometimes, these intentions intermix. In consequence, videos can be used to have discussions on all kinds of topics, including reflections on personal experiences, identity and philosophical analysis. Examples of these productions throughout the history of

cinema are plenty. There they have received the name of essay-films. For instance, *A pervert's guide to cinema* (Fiennes et al. 2006), *F is for Fake* (Reichenbach et al. 1973), *Sans Soleil* (Marker, 1983) or *F is for Fake* (Welles, O. et. al, 1973). These films tell not so much stories about characters, but present situations and plots for the development of an argument or to explore a question, a feeling, an impression. In *A pervert's guide to cinema*, for example, we see philosopher Slavoj Žižek analyzing the concept of ideology in various seminal films, drawing terms and categories of analysis from lacanian psychoanalysis and hegelian and marxist thought for the examination of western pop culture. In *Sans Soleil*, Marker reads a letter to an intimate destinatee detailing the impressions and feelings awoken in him by the differences and similarities of Japan, Africa and the West. What seems like an array of random photographs and documentary footage transforms into a meditation on belonging, revolution, politics, generational clashes and nostalgia. Finally, *F is for Fake*, presents a docudrama about the life and ordeals of art forger Elmyr de Hory, ultimately questioning the value of art, the role of artists, art critics, museums and the general relation between public, authenticity and the value of truth: If the works are good, does it matter who made them? These types of productions gained popularity during the 70's and 80's, and were heavily influenced by the new wave of french cinema and post-war european directors (Godard, Resais, Pasolini, Bergman, Tarkovsky). Another event that caused their rise is the appearance of portable cameras much more economically accessible to the masses, which prompted a start in amateur filmic production that continued through the 90's, with the appearance of the home video technology, and to the present day, with digital video. This technological breakthrough was also the cause of the beginnings of video art, with people being able to experiment more freely with footage and compositions, not needing production companies and large crews and sums of money to make their productions.

Returning to González, the expressive dimension “deals with all things relative to the composition and the visible form of the message” (González, 2010, p.74. Translated from Spanish) and is divided in its narrative and mechanical elements. Narrative elements are those that “intervene in the **plot** and the sequence in which **action** is organized” (González, 2010, p.74. Translated from Spanish). In other words, the structure and elements of the story being told, themes, conflicts, intrigues, characters, events and narrator, but also the order in which things

happen: introduction, plot twist, development, climax and resolution. The structure of the action and elements in the plot are extremely similar to the structure of a written essay presented earlier, introduction, core and conclusion. So it is safe to say, with Phillip Lopate (1992, 119), that “Even essays have plots!”, and it is the story of how its creator comes to think what they think about something. On the other hand, mechanical elements are those related to the composition of frames in photography, footage in video and soundtrack.

If an essay fails to deliver its author’s take on the subject matter, it probably didn’t help them to achieve it. It was a fruitless effort, a waste of intellectual power that got lost amid numerous considerations, unable to organize them to construct an informed opinion. In audiovisual essays, the action is not advanced by the actions of the characters so much as the handling of concepts and different points of view by the author. Audiovisual essays have an introduction that familiarizes us with the subject matter, what the author thinks and asks about it. They also have a body, where the problems pointed earlier are expanded upon and the arguments in favor of one side are laid out. This section reaches climax when the conflict between arguments and worldviews is resolved by a triumphant author, now proven right. At last, the conclusion of the video asserts the author’s take on the subject matter, enriched by the reflection both in its weak and strong points. These conceptual plot elements, however, need a material substrate to work with, something to be arranged. This is where the use of image, footage and sound comes into play by means of the expressive dimension. The visual and sound elements can be illustrative of the point the narrator in the film is making but can also serve as a matter for examination. Images and sounds might repeat on the screen just as events repeat in the author’s mind to be reiterated or re-interpreted. In any case, the audiovisual elements function alongside the narrated argumentation as a stand-in for reality, an evocation of the object of analysis. Whatever use they are given by the creator, they must also be given an intentional place and time of appearance in the video. In other words, the intention of the message and concepts it aims to transmit (argumentative dimension) and the aesthetic substrate and the structure of the plot (expressive dimension) determine one another. This order is observable when creators directly address their audiences by talking to the camera, using text or narrating over the

audiovisual elements. By doing this, creators guide viewers through their process of thought in the same way that logical connectors would take them from one element in a text to the next one.

Parallel to these dimensions run the technical elements, the tools needed in the different stages of pre-production, production and post-production (rundown, storyboard, script, screenplay). Pushak (2016) and Willems (2018) describe their processes for making video essays and present them as analogue to that for making a written one. They begin by investigating the topic of interest and formulating some questions to give their inquiry direction. Afterwards they revise and confront references on the subject. Only then can they start to write a draft of the script. All of this can be seen as pre-production, with the preparation of elements such as costumes, makeup, lights, cameras, microphones and sets also belonging to this stage. Once this early stage is finished, the creators begin production by shooting the footage the video consists of, or gathering already recorded footage. Finally comes the post production stage, where the creators edit the recorded material and organize it in the desired sequence for the montage of the final work; special and sound effects are added during this phase. This process is analogous to that of a written essay, where there is an initial phase of planning and investigation, followed by another of written production. Lastly, there is a period of revision, correction and edition of the material to get the final product ready for publication.

1.3. Characteristics of video essays

It is fairly easy to consider a kind of video production whose elements are arranged in accordance to its argumentative intention. Having its roots in essayistic films, written essays and video art, the video essay gives its creators the opportunity to use an extensive variety of pictoric, academic, dramatic, practical, acoustic and cinematic elements to construct and communicate a personal understanding of a subject. For this particular way of audiovisual content the argumentative dimension would have a much more prominent role than the expressive dimension, being the quality and clarity of the argumentation the most determining factor for the organization of all elements in the feature. The video essay is also personal and intimate in its place of enunciation and construction, but strives for objectivity by confronting the author's views with those that influence or oppose them. Finally, the argumentation can favor one of two

tones. When the author uses the video to present and justify their beliefs and try to persuade others of it, video essays are affirmative. However, when the argumentation takes on a more informative and expository tone, with the creator concerning themselves more with clarifying and criticising other people's opinions on a particular subject, video essays are exploratory (examples of this tone are best exemplified in philosophical dialogues).

It is time to sketch the characteristics of the video essay. This list contains both features noted by scholars, creators and myself. These features do not constitute an all or nothing type of classification, so even though they are as general as they get, some videos might not have them.

- **An argumentative intention:** The creator makes clear to the viewer that they are not reporting events or narrating fiction, but presenting opinions, whether their's or other's, in order to judge which of them are valid and which are not.
- **Greater importance is placed on the argumentative dimension and the structure of the argumentation:** It is clear that the creator favors clarity on their opinion, intention and arguments over presenting an aesthetic spectacle. On this note, the creator presents their arguments as objectively valid and truthful. Use of bibliographic, academic, iconographic, filmic, sound and rhetoric elements in a non-linear temporal structure, even when following the tripartite structure of introduction, core and conclusion (Biemann, 2003; Kaye 2016; Ramos & Zhou 2015). Events do not need to happen first so that their effects can follow, because no events are being presented. Concepts and ideas are introduced and explained when necessary.
- **Interdisciplinarity:** The type of reflection and the resources offered by the format motivate the creator not to limit themselves to a single discipline in order to solve their inquiry. This, however, is not mandatory, as some video essays can be about a very narrowly defined subject.
- **Pedagogical interest:** Creators are aware of the variety of their potential viewers, so they assume that their work is not made exclusively for specialists. Thus, they

are concerned with presenting all the information needed to understand their videos in the most accessible way for non-experts in the matter.

- **Easy access:** By being transmitted through online platforms and taking less time to watch than a written essay takes to be read, they can reach a wider public faster.
- **Breaking of the fourth wall (Lopate, 1992):** In their video essays, creators talk to the camera or narrate out frame in such a way as directly addressing their audience in conversation. This narration, that can also be achieved by using text, is what advances the argumentation through its different stages. Sometimes, this narration becomes a monologue.
- **Cheap production (Bresland, 2010; García-Roldán, 2020, p.112):** The use of digital video and the availability of recording devices and editing software considerably decreases the cost of production in comparison to professional films. Which allows virtually everyone to be a potential consumer and creator.
- **Hypertextuality (Biemann, 2003):** As some elements referenced are not found in the video or thoroughly explained in it, there is a sense in which a more in-depth comprehension of the message is achievable by consulting those external elements in earnest. However, it is perfectly possible to understand the video without recurring to this consultation.

Chapter 2. Case study

Video essayists as artist philosophers

This chapter appropriates the concepts of argumentative and expressive dimensions in audiovisual productions, explained in the first chapter, and combines them with the list of features outlaid at the end of that same chapter in order to propose a method for analyzing video essays. The dimensions of audiovisual productions presented in the first chapter can be used to grasp the conceptual weight of expressive elements in videos, showing they obey, illustrate and add to the argumentation held by the creators of the video. Furthermore, the method of analysis can also be appropriated by teachers and educators in case they decide to incorporate the making of video essays into their pedagogical exercise. With that in mind, three YouTube videos are examined through this lense, each one pertaining to creators who have professional academic formation as philosophers but have renounced to life in academia. The first case is *Brexit: What Is Democracy?* (Thorn, 2019), from the channel *Philosophy Tube* (from British actress and philosopher Abigail Thorn). The second example will be *El Marxismo Cultural no existe* (Quetzal, 2018), from the channel *Ovejas Eléctricas*. And closing the chapter is *Opulence* (Wynn, 2019), from the channel *Contrapoints* (created by Natalie Wynn). The order in which these videos appear here will be explained in depth in the third chapter of the investigation, being completely dependent on how well they fit the discussion held there. Suffice to say, for now, that while this chapter considers Contrapoint's video artistically superior to Philosophy Tube's and Quetzal's -since Wynn makes deeper and richer use of aesthetic elements to add layers of meaning to her video- the themes explored in it don't refer directly to the discussion about democracy that is the pillar of the final chapter.

Moreover, it is important to note that not all video essays possess the features outlined in the pages above, and the three that are examined in this chapter are no exceptions. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the definition given in chapter 1 is not prescriptive, but descriptive, i.e., it's not about what ought all video essays to have in order to be included in that category, but about how different creators use the resources available to them to better convey their messages. That being said, the three videos here examined present most of the characteristics priorly

established. Moreover these features lead to two important and foundational ways in which art can be used in pedagogy: the exercise of imagination, creativity, playfulness and empathy, and a means to approach socio-political issues (Nussbaum, 2010, p.108); of that, these videos have plenty.

Additionally, a series of conditions must be acknowledged for this study, given that its scope is limited to video essays found mostly on the platform of Youtube. The fundamental conditions are material and economic: certain technology is required to connect to the internet and reproduce the videos, laptops, personal computers, smartphones or tablets, as well as electric, telephone and internet connections. The second condition is an educational one, the user must know how to operate the devices previously mentioned and also, for this particular case, speak English or Spanish. The final condition can fall under a more political scope: censorship. This can come by means of governmental restrictions to certain websites or content, Youtube's algorithm for the preservation of intellectual property that demonetizes or deletes videos infringing such laws, or simple age restrictions for entering a website. So, depending on the place we speak from, we can consider both the making and consumption of video essays a sort of privilege. Especially in a country as unequal as Colombia, where access to any of these conditions is a privilege or an impossibility, depending on the region and socio-economic stratus one lives in. We can now move to the main subjects of discussion.

2.1. [*Philosophy Tube*](#)

Abigail Thorn is a Scottish philosopher and actress based in London. Assigned male at birth in 1993, she attended St. Andrew's University in Scotland, where she graduated in 2016 with an MA in philosophy, she then moved to London and obtained an MA in acting. Ever since, she's been constructing both a career as an actress and her YouTube channel *Philosophy Tube* (Sosis 2019/2021; Thorn, 2015). Thorn has been clear about the educational motivations that drive and ground her channel, "the plan was just to record what I had learned in lectures and give it away for free!" (Thorn, interviewed by Sosis 2019/2021). Of course, Thorn would not be in this monograph if her videos would have stayed just as mere recordings of what she learned during her years in university. At a very specific point her style shifted from doing short vlogs to a

considerably more elaborate, experimental and artistic production, essentially moving from talking about philosophy in videos to doing philosophy through videos. Says Thorn in an interview with Cliff Sosis:

I'd say I have two videos that I'm most proud of, for very different reasons. The first is my **Philosophy of Antifa** video, which I like because as far as I know nobody had made anything like it on YouTube before. There are lots of videos about antifascist action but I don't think anybody had ever sat down and explained the whole thing, theory and practice, with proper citations and anticipated objections before. I got to plant the flag on that one, and my video on it has become one of the definitive resources for learning about Antifa, which makes me very proud! The second is my one on **Elon Musk**. I was in a bit of a rut with the channel for a while until I went to **VidCon** in June 2018 and came back totally inspired to try new things. Even though I think **I've since surpassed it**, the Musk video was like a renaissance for the show – the beginning of Philosophy Tube Season 2. I took a gamble in hiring a studio rather than filming in my bedroom and fully committed to making videos as art, rather than lectures. I really put a lot into it and you can see that from what's on the screen. (Thorn as interviewed by Sosis, 2019/2021)

For this analysis, the video chosen is [*Brexit: What Is Democracy?*](#) (*Brexit* from now on). This video was originally uploaded to *Philosophy Tube* on march 8 of 2019 and has a duration of 42:00 minutes.

Conceptually, *Brexit* posits a series of critics that can be made to democracy as a form of social organization and government, mainly regarding representation, legitimacy of participation, equality and participation, and deals with them by concluding with the moral duty to become a good citizen by exercising epistemic recistence (Thorn, 2019, 37:54). Throughout the video, Thorn uses various classic and contemporary political thinkers to define and critique democracy. Plato, Mill, Marx, Mbembe, Ficker and others (for a full view of the references used by Thorn, head to the “Bibliography” section in the description of the video), make visible one of the features presented in the first chapter: the use of academic references. These references are used to raise questions on the legitimacy and value of voting as a mechanism of popular participation in representative democracies, the idea of who is best suited for governing and the structural limitations inherent to democracy. But there is another level to the video, a second argumentative line that runs parallel to the principal, summarizing the plot of *Arrival*, the 2016 film by Denis Villeneuve about the dangers of misunderstanding and miscommunication in diplomatically fragile situations. With this, Thorn implies that contemporary societies are formed by factions

and individuals with interests and worldviews so fundamentally different that it is almost inevitable to always leave someone unrepresented or misrepresented. The film follows a linguist and a physicist in their attempts to communicate with the crew of an alien ship that landed in the United States. The investigators are only part of a larger team led by the US military that pressures them to interpret the situation as an invasion, as do the teams of other nations. Even in this extreme situation democracy seems the best alternative for organization. The violent tensions are dealt with by attempting to widen the worldview of the characters, making it more comprehensive of other's interests, aware of the prejudices that might determine their beliefs and more responsibly formed. In that sense, this film is an example of epistemic resistance, by having the characters progress to a point where they are able "to speak each other's language" (Thorn, 2019, 31:58).

In spite of ending with a recommendation to exercise epistemic resistance, *Brexit* is an exploratory video essay. This is due to the fact that all the discussion held throughout the video aims not to persuade us to act with epistemic resistance, but to critique democracy from different points of view. In that sense, Thorn is trying to educate her viewers on the limitations of democracy.

In technical and stylistic terms, *Brexit* is a considerably simple video. It alternates between segments consisting of two monologues that complement each other, both delivered directly by Thorn to her audience. The first monologue opens the video and with an ominous disaster alarm playing while, on a black background, Thorn appears dressed with a raggedy and burned business suit with a Union Jack tie equally burned. Thorn's face and hair are all scrambled and full of what appears to be debris dust, as if she had just survived the disaster that is the exit of the UK from the EU without any foreign policy deal. This "Raggedy" Thorn delivers most of the political theory, concepts and the arguments explicitly about democracy. Conversely, the second monologue is delivered by a much more calmed Thorn, dressed in an orange biohazard suit, like the one worn by the main characters of *Arrival* in their interactions with the extraterrestrial visitors. This "Biohazard" Thorn explains the plot and themes of the film as a means to illustrate the points made by the Raggedy Thorn about the difficulties to reach

consensus or cooperation when dealing with people of different worldviews, with the ever present danger of the tense situations turning violent. Given that Thorn separates so well the roles of each one of the monologues, we can identify the monologue delivered by Raggedy Thorn with the argumentative dimension of the video while that of the Biohazard Thorn would align more with the expressive dimension of it. Nevertheless, we should remember that the two dimensions are not separate parts of the productions, but they unravel simultaneously. Therefore, the choosing of two monologues and two characters for delivering them and the order in which each monologue unfolds is part of the expressive dimension. As for the soundtrack of the video, it is mostly atmospheric and minimalistic, with a synthesizer playing dim and long notes with reverberation effects through most of the video, so discreetly that they are barely noticeable. For this reason, we shall make no mention of the soundtrack through our analysis of the expressive dimension, other than when sound conveys meaning.

At the end of the video, the two monologues merge into one, the Raggedy Thorn occupies the left side of the screen and Biohazard Thorn takes the right side and they speak the same optimistic words at the same heartwarming time:

Through one frame, the fragility of democracy and the possibility of it going wrong is a terrifying argument against it. But if it's true that it does affect our epistemic characters, then by realizing democracy's drawbacks, we open up opportunities not just to make it better, but to better ourselves as well. (Thorn, 2019, 37:54)

Table 1. Correspondence between the argumentative and expressive dimensions in *Brexit: What Is Democracy?*

Time in minutes	Argumentative Dimension	Expressive Dimension
00:00 - 7:34	Introduction: “Why is democracy a good thing? Is it? Plato didn’t think so” (Thorn, 2019, 1:53). This question will drive the argumentation of the whole video. In this first segment, Thorn explores the notion of who is best to govern and to rule, if a person allegedly educated and formed for it but whose action would alienate most of the people’s interests (a posture of moral intellectualism), or someone who represents the general will of the people,	A natural disaster alarm rings two times before, queueing the entrance of Raggedy Thorn in a medium shot. She seems to be in a studio with black background. Thorn looks shocked and beaten, wearing a torn and burned suit with a Union Jack tie also burned. This costume seems to serve the function of representing the chaos that Brexit has caused in British politics and the panic for the uncertain future of a no deal exit from the EU. After Thorn explains the idea of moral

	regardless of their qualifications for governing and of the results that their decisions based on said will are going to have. Also, with the introduction of the plot from <i>Arrival</i>, Thorn posits that life in society is the same as the interaction between cultures who speak different languages and therefore have different frameworks for the understanding of the world: Societies have sectors and individuals with different and sometimes irreconcilable opinions on what issues ought to be addressed, how and when, or even what counts as a political issue.	intellectualism that led Plato to posit his Philosopher King, the camera cuts to the same studio room full of fog, from which Thorn emerges wearing an orange biohazard suit with a transparent mask that allows to see her face inside the suit. It is while wearing this attire that Thorn begins to explain the plot of <i>Arrival</i>. Another interpretation of the costume is that it represents isolation, precaution, distrust and individualism. Although Thorn never says it, these feelings erode and threaten both democracy and life in society. This situation is represented in the plot of the film by the first encounters between humans and aliens and the precaution and impatience humans display in their attempts to communicate with them, ready to attack at the slightest perception of threat. How can humans be sure that they are in fact reacting correctly if they are not sure of what the aliens' intentions are?
7:35 - 33:50	Body: At the core of Thorn's video lie two main critiques to democracy and a possible way out. The first is the problem of representation through the utilitarian lense that Thorn draws from John Stuart Mill. Thorn posits that while democracy is regarded as the best way to govern in order to ensure the maximum general happiness, there are, nonetheless, some sectors and interests that are left unrepresented (Thorn, 2019, 15:20), as is the case with mentally ill people, children, and to some extent prisoners, residents of the country with no citizenship and people abroad who are directly affected by the situation of the country in question (e. g., in the context of Brexit, the people from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland). The other critique is to the legitimacy of a vote in relation to the problem of representation. Again, using the Brexit referendum as example, Thorn asks why the votes of only the 26.6% of registered voters in the UK who chose "leave" are considered the will of the whole country, and what legitimacy	By this point of the plot in <i>Arrival</i>, the scientists in charge of the American interaction team want to be cautious in their attempts to learn the alien language, so they won't misinterpret as threatening any of the aliens' actions. This has two effects, 1) it angers the impatient military directors of the team, and 2) alienates the public, since only "the experts" are allowed to interact with the aliens and be updated on a situation that clearly interests every person on the planet. This section of the plot also introduces the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis of linguistics. According to this hypothesis, the language of a community determines, or at least influences, the way in which its members understand and ultimately experience the world (Thorn, 2019, 11:11). This is exemplified in the film by the difference of writing systems between humans and aliens and the non-linear way in which the latter experience time. At the same time as Raggedy Thorn flashes out democratic theory and Biohazard Thorn summarizes the film, there are images, clips

	do some of those votes have if they were the result of misinformed decisions or if the voter repents from their initial opinion. Moreover, the emphasis on elections as means for participation tends to reduce democracy only to this practice, when it also includes protests, revocation of representatives and decisions, freedom of speech, strikes, and relating to people on the basis of equality. On the other hand, some proponents of democracy claim that it promotes epistemic values for the construction of a good epistemic character. “By encouraging people to take an interest in how their country is run to cultivate the intelligence required to participate” (Mill, as quoted in Thorn, 2019, 29:52). However, the formation of a good character requires people to exercise epistemic resistance, not only to be informed, but to be aware of the prejudices, beliefs, conditions and origins of our worldviews, in order to bond more easily with people of different interests. Plural societies would actually be benefited in this argument, since there would be a wider scope of issues to address and more points of view from which to approach them (Thorn, 2019, 30:30).	and quotes of the things and texts they reference. These elements serve an illustrative purpose as visual aids.
33:51 - 42:00	Conclusion: Thorn recalls, as an example of epistemic resistance, that both British and US democracies were extremely exclusionary at their beginnings, having explicitly racist, sexist and imperialist legislations, but thanks to centuries of political activism, they have become more just societies. With that concept, Thorns seems to posit a democratic <i>praxis</i> committed to the development of dispositions for critical thinking and empathy as the basis for political participation (Thorn, 2018, 35:39). Yes, democracy has its limitations, but the fact that they can be pointed out does not mean	Biohazard Thorn has lifted her facemask in a show of good faith and trust. By this point in <i>Arrival</i>, the attempts of peaceful interaction with the aliens have failed, favoring a world scale offensive led by the Chinese and US governments. This apocalyptic approach is halted by the protagonist of the film, Louise, the linguist that led the American team. She has learned the alien language and understood their message and sneaks through the communications of the military centre to call and convince the Chinese military commander to have faith in peace, favoring an approach based on emotion rather than reason and calculation. As Biohazard Thorn

	they cannot be fixed, democracy can be improved.	finishes to summarize the film, an optimistic music plays in the background and Raggedy Thorn appears in the left side of the screen, while they both recite the sentence quoted above.
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2.2. [Quetzal](#)

Sadly, information regarding the creator's life other than what he himself has revealed in some of his videos is unavailable. He is a homosexual man based in Barcelona, Spain, and studied philosophy at an unrevealed university. He never showed his face on his channel *Ovejas Eléctricas*, remaining almost completely anonymous until 2018, when he posted a picture of himself and other youtubers attending the Sitges film festival. Since then, he has continued to show his face on social media and streaming platforms, but on his main YouTube channel he prefers to represent himself with the drawing of an anthropomorphic cartoon cat of his creation, named Quetzal³. Quetzal is particularly interested in subjects of aesthetics and culture critique, specially in the video-game and film industries, and, to a lesser extent, politics in general. His videos are usually reviews on pop culture milestones or fashions and how they relate or tackle socio-political issues: video-games, films, shows and sometimes literature and poetry. Nevertheless, there are a considerable amount of videos dealing with more complex issues such as Disney's cuasi-monopoly on western pop culture, the experience of being a homosexual man, mental health, accounts of history and corruption scandals in the video game industry, the history of the political left in Spain and even an introduction to anarchism.

[El marxismo cultural no existe](#) is a 26 minutes video uploaded on november 29th 2018. Stylistically, the video is mainly a monologue accompanied by still drawings and footage and images from news reports and archives. Thus, two of the characteristics presented in the first chapter are present: a narrator who addresses the audience directly and the use of filmic, pictorial, sound and academic references in an apparently absurd manner. In the video, Quetzal

³ Quetzals are birds endemic to central america that were worshiped by Mayan and Aztec cultures as part of their pantheons. In addition to this, the name of the channel *Ovejas Eléctricas* [electric sheep] is a clear reference to Phillip K. Dick's 1968 SciFi novel "Do androids dream of electric sheep?", adapted to film in 1982 by Ridley Scott under the title "Blade Runner".

stelerizes as an artificial being created by George Soros and an anonymous businessmen board who want to use him to spread the message of *cultural marxism* and achieve their goal of global economic domination *via* the destruction of Western values. In some bits throughout the video, Quetzal's character clashes with *Holocaust-Denier Yukiko* and her pet/companion *Führer-Chan* (a parody of Adolf Hitler in the body of the Pokémon Mew). Yukiko is a stand-in for people who, inadvertently, have fallen to the rhetoric of hate speeches, regardless of how they came in contact with it, resulting in a violent rejection for everything remotely left-wing (LGBTQ struggles, race and gender issues, economic inequality critique, worker struggles for better working conditions, etc.). The video ends with Quetzal's killing of Yukiko after a gruesome fight (that happens off camera), but it is already too late, the hate speech tool that is cultural marxism has already spread throughout the world.

Conceptually, the video provides an account of what cultural marxism is, how it differs from actual marxism, how it came to be and what role it plays in present-day politics. In other words, this is an educational video and presents us with a detailed analysis of its subject, strengthened by the use of academic, historical and journalistic material. Nevertheless, the arguments often feel short or insufficient for the claims Quetzal makes, but it can be argued that this is dealt with when he warns the viewers that this video draws largely on concepts and information already laid-out in other videos he previously published at the beginning of 2018 (Quetzal, 2019, 02:10). This means that a more in-depth understanding of *El Marxismo Cultural no existe* is somewhat dependent on other videos. Consequently, another characteristic can be observed: hypertextuality.

Table 2. Correspondence between the argumentative and expressive dimensions in *El marxismo cultural no existe* (Quetzal, 2019):

Time in minutes	Argumentative Dimension	Expressive Dimension
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00:00 - 10:15	Introduction: Quetzal introduces the concepts of cultural marxism and classical marxism. Thesis of the video: Cultural marxism does not exist as ideology, because it is a straw-man fallacy. Quetzal seeks to refute the opposite opinion, drawn mainly from Agustín Laje: Cultural marxism is real, because there are a series of minorities bent on sabotaging the world's economy and traditional values, like family and gender roles and the freedom of speech. Thus they must be neutralized or politically impeached.	Quetzal is created by Lord Soros in a laboratory tank and presented to the board of businessmen as the ultimate instrument to spread cultural marxism, undermining western values and economy until only jew billionaires can thrive. Quetzal carries out his task with cynicism, the idea of a jewish conspiracy is a joke to him. Illustrations of Quetzal and the other characters alternate with clips from interviews with Agustín Laje, news reports and pictures related to the discussion.
10:16 - 21:30	Core: Cultural Marxism has its roots in the antisemitic term <i>Kulturbolschewismus</i>, a propaganda concept coined during the Nazi rise to power in 1920's Germany. As the Vanguards gained popularity, conservatives argued they were a tool from communists and non-aryan races to destroy Western values and finish off what little was left of the German people after the Versailles Treaty. The <i>Bauhaus</i> and the School of Frankfurt were pointed as main examples of jew aggression to The West. This concept was updated during the 1990's by William S. Lind, who argued that jews fleeing the Second World War brought Cultural Marxism with them to the United States. In parallel, George Soros was made the face the conspiracy, due to his hungarian-jewish ancestry and his contributions to electoral campaigns against the Bush and Trump administrations.	Holocaust Denier Yukiko and Führer-Chan confront Quetzal, claiming that the conspiracy is real and he has no right to violate their freedom of speech. An illustration of Quetzal sittin at his desk and addressing the viewers alternates with images of newspapers, photography archives and quotations. Quetzal narrates over these visual elements. At the time of this presentation, the viewer is given the impression that Quetzal and Yukiko are fighting off camera.
21:30 - 26:00	Conclusion: Cultural Marxism does not exist in any way other than as a propaganda tool used by right-wing sympathizers to create a straw-man able to fit every point of view different to theirs.	The fight between Quetzal and Yukiko is over. However, it is too late. The lie of Cultural Marxism has spread and many people are now convinced of it. Even though he won, Quetzal does not look triumphant, but beaten and exhausted.

2.3. [Contrapoints](#):

Natalie Wynn is a transgender woman who was born in Arlington, Virginia in 1988 (Wynn, 2018). According to an interview with Andrew Marantz for *The Newyorker* (2018), she majored in philosophy and eventually quit the PhD program at Northwestern University, Illinois, once she grew disenchanted with academic life. After some time wandering various jobs and failed attempts at music (she's a pianist), she began noticing a growing radicalization on internet media, a perfect place for the spread of hate-speech based on uninformed claims; situation that led her to create her YouTube channel *ContraPoints* in 2016 as a means to disassemble and counterbalance these speeches, with special interest in issues of race and gender. "She decided to create her own videos, and these <<tinker-toy attempts>> at deconstructing social justice issues through a left-wing lens soon caught on. More importantly, they became a creative outlet" (Hall, 2019).

The first videos from the channel -sadly no longer available- showcase a much more straightforward vlogging style of content, with Wynn -still at early stages of her transition -reacting to specific hate speech claims. She would watch videos and record her reaction to the claims in them, debunking them with logic and philosophy. Eventually, as the channel grew in popularity and her skills and tools for video creation increased, her videos started to become short-films starring various characters arguing against each other with conflicting views on gender, race and the discriminatory implications behind seemingly harmless political stands (more often than not, these characters would represent the same points she originally answered directly to). If you will, these videos were XXI century socratic dialogues demonstrating that she understands the adversary's claim before disproving them. It is patent that the concern that let to the creation of the channel spurs not only from an observer standpoint, but was actually intertwined with her personal experience as a transgender woman. That is to say, she has more of a political goal than an educational one with her videos.

Wynn's channel is very prolific in popularity (it counts over a million subscribers), quality and variety of the content. *ContraPoints* offers dozens of videos in the format of short-filmed socratic dialogues, video essays (both exploratory and affirmative) and vlogs. For this chapter the focus will be only on one. [Opulence](#) is an example of an *affirmative* video essay,

because in it Wynn makes and defends her claim rather than restricting herself to explore different viewpoints on the matter. In this 46:06 minutes feature -originally uploaded to YouTube on October 12th of 2019 -, Wynn states that “aesthetic sensibility ... begins with absolute pleasure” but then “you learn taste according to the social class of your upbringing”, thus introducing a moral content in aesthetic judgement (Wynn, 2019, 1:42). Throughout the video she examines the origins of the opulent aesthetic that seems to be the goal of contemporary pop culture, distinguishing between the opulence of the traditionally wealthy and powerful from that of individual persons who have risen from marginalized sectors, becoming beacons of hope and role models for those who remain unprivileged. These two types of opulence are contrasted through the video, showing that the more vulgar you-own-everything opulence is replacing the old and sober opulence, introducing an almost dialectical view of aesthetics: dominant classes impose an aesthetic according to their worldview, as this class starts to decline, the conception held by oppressed classes starts to gain ground as a new worldview climbs to power. Sadly, this is only explored in the final section of the video, so Wynn does not go too deep into it, limiting herself to state that aristocratic aesthetics gave rise to Goth aesthetics, leading her to believe in the start of a new aesthetic of abandoned malls and ruined factories as capitalism starts to crumble in a series of self-generated economic crisis. Wynn also divides the video into seven segments that appear constituent of her characterization of opulence: Success, fantasy, class, taste, glamour, envy and ruin.

When considering *Opulence* stylistically, almost all characteristics of the video essays are present, except perhaps for the cheap production. She addresses the viewers directly through $\frac{3}{4}$ shots and first shots, narrating over images, text and videos related to what she is speaking about, she uses references from canonical philosophers (Kant and Sontag), cultural critics and writers (Wilde), contemporary political activists and performers (Joe Weldon and Terre Thaemlitz), photos of art archives, memes, etc. That being the case, *Opulence* makes use of the absurd by arranging unrelated elements that add up to the poetic and conceptual intentions, and the breaking of the fourth wall through narration and talking directly to the camera. The use of all these elements in a persuasive way indicates that Wynn presents her proposal as a satisfactory explanation on why people admire opulence and try to display it in whatever way it is in reach.

She presents this claim as one that everyone can agree to after considering the arguments she puts forth. Now, as for the cheap production part, there is nothing cheap about it. By this point in her career, Wynn is able to afford a production team, she also uses soundtracks by composer Zöe Blade mixing baroque opera with trap and hip-hop beats and has even built a small studio in her house, full of costumes, makeup and props. Nevertheless, the production cost for this video, with hired production crew, remains much lower than one made by a production company or channel. Also, for this video in particular, she used spaces in the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), in the city of Baltimore. A tie-in to that is the importance that costumes and sets have in this video. Wynn speaks of a) the display of wealth and power through clothing, decoration and mannerisms, and b) how those who don't have those attributes make it look like they do, ultimately proving that they won't be reduced to a powerless minority and denouncing economic inequality. It is because of these themes that Wynn dresses in various costumes that evoke opulent aesthetics of french courtesan aristocracy, channeling Marie-Antoniette, the sarcophagus of ancient egyptian pharaohs, a roman Patritius and a Marilyn Monroe inspired character. The aristocratic Wynn appears in the main hall of the MICA, conveying that she is as grand as one of those neo classical marble statues from the Renaissance. As for the pharo-like Wynns are submerged in bathtubs full of fantasy jewels, mimicking the treasures those ancient rulers were buried with. The 1950's Wynn sensually covers her body with a fur coat (all in black and white video). At last, there is the Vampiress Wynn, who lays on red silk sheets, surrounded by mortuary flowers and dressed in a gothic fashion.

Table 3: Correspondence between the argumentative and expressive dimensions in the video *Opulence* (Wynn, 2018):

Time in minutes	Argumentative dimension	Expressive dimension
00:00 - 13:47	Intro: Wynn explicitly presents the thesis: “aesthetic sensibility... begins with absolute pleasure... but we learn taste according to the social class of our upbringing” (Wynn, 2019, 1:42), so aesthetic judgments are imbued with moral and political content. In other words, there	Three sections can be grouped here, the opening sequence of the video and the first two divisions made by Wynn, <i>Success</i> and <i>Fantasy</i> . In the prelude, Wynn sits on a Louis XIV couch in the middle of the Main Hall of MICA, matching her character to the neoclassical statues and other baroque works

	is a process of socialization through which individuals learn to approve or disapprove their brute feelings of pleasure and disgust. In the West, opulence has become desirable and admirable, equating wealth with social success. It makes sense, then, that not only there be a social imperative towards wealth but towards opulence too, so that people can appear to be of a higher <i>status</i>. Opulence functions in two different ways for two different social classes: “For the wealthy and powerful, opulence is a flex. For the marginalized and impoverished, opulence is a simulacrum of the wealth and power they’ve been denied.” (Wynn, 2019, 13:14). This is, by dressing and behaving as people from the upper classes, persons from marginalized or lower classes escape their condition and pretend to be socially successful.	of art there; this iteration will be referred to as “Aristocratic Wynn”. For the other two sections there are two variations on the same general costume, for both of them Wynn lays in a bathtub full of fantasy jewelry, wearing crowns, earrings and extravagant makeup; hence, these shall be called “Pharaoh Wynn”. Nevertheless, the Pharaoh Wynn in <i>Success</i> has a warmer color palette, with golds and reds dominating makeup, costume and scenery (she’s reminiscent of a pharaoh’s sarcophagus), while the one for <i>Fantasy</i> is considerably colder and darker, the jewels and crown Wynn wears are translucent, neon lights of blue and a very dim red dominate the whole frame and Wynn’s movements are toned down to the point that only her face shows any sign of life when speaking; this last one will be the “Mummified Wynn”. The soundtrack of the first section is carnival music, mocking the basic assumption of wealth as social success. The rest of the sections have a succession of baroque opera pieces and trap music beats that, more often than not, are combined in a single track, as if “vulgarizing” the traditionally classy opera with popular sounds.
13:14 - 34:17	Body: This is where Wynn’s main argumentation takes place by examining three constituent concepts of opulence: class, taste and glamour. The result is a tension between two models of opulence, what she calls “the old rich” (embodiment of White Anglo Saxon Protestant [WASP] values of discretion, elegance and austerity) and “the new rich” (the kind of indiscreet ostentation exercised by individuals from lower or marginalized sectors when they acquire wealth). Furthermore, the new rich turn into a beacon for other middle and low class people on how to become rich and how to act when they achieve this. Here Wynn rejects the marxist framework of class struggle for its outdated simplicity of only two classes, opting instead for Fussell’s	This part would engulf the sections <i>Class</i>, <i>Taste</i>, <i>Glamour</i> and <i>Envy</i>. The final iteration added by Wynn here is a version of herself imitating the 1950’s sex symbol Marilyn Monroe. As Bach’s Cello Suite no. 1 plays, the camera shoots in black and white a presumably naked Wynn in a bathtub, covering herself with a fur coat. Then, for <i>Taste</i>, <i>Glamour</i> and <i>Envy</i>, variations on previous costumes are used, mixing their features, showing that the concepts presented cannot be taken to be as simply or independently as they appear to be: aristocracy has much of fantasy, just as camp and tackiness can have a lot of taste, depth and sensibility. Afterwards, the 1950’s Wynn gains cold colors and the Mummified Wynn is given some life by a warm light. Soundwise there is the same alternance and

	emphasis on social and cultural capital and its influence on the nine classes he proposes (Fussell, as referenced in Wynn, 2019, 15:17). The replacement of WASP “class” by opulence’s “cash” is supported with the introduction of the concepts of <i>camp</i> and <i>tacky</i>, which the WASP culture used as slurs for the new rich. It follows that aesthetic value is determined by what those in power deem beautiful, artistic and valuable. So it would seem that there is a dialectical tension between two considerations of aesthetics originating on opposing sides of the social spectrum, and that it is just a matter of time before the new rich replace the old. However, with the introduction of the <i>glamour</i> and <i>envy</i> concepts, Wynn suggests that this tension won’t resolve itself, because it is anchored in unquestioned social hierarchies (Thaemlitz, as quoted in Wynn, 2019, 30:03). In a word, the oppressed will become oppressors, because social mobility in capitalist societies remains an individual process that will engender envy and resentment in those who remain powerless (Íbidem, 38:03).	mixture of classical music and baroque opera with trap and hip-hop beats. As for the visual elements, Wynn uses imagery and footage that illustrates or relates to the subject she is talking about, but also direct quotations of her academic references, read by invited guests.
34:18 - 46:55	Conclusion: Opulence is appealing because it signifies social success. It is empowering for those who exhibit it, whether they are pretending to be wealthy and powerful or they have them in actuality. For Wynn, this means that there is also another type of aesthetic on the rise, one that is not opulent, but gothic. Given that the old rich opulence is dying out, with staples of it crumbling or absent, e.g., rows of abandoned factories and large ostentatious shopping malls now empty or in ruins, “there is a new aesthetic sensibility emerging here, a Gothic aesthetic of the XXIst century... this decaying opulence that is the carcass of XXth century consumerism.” (Wynn, 2019, 45:27)	Ruin: This part seems to be somewhat disconnected from the rest, almost as an appendix to the video. As she talks about the origins of Gothic aesthetic and vampires in a mistified dying aristocracy, Wynn impersonates a vampiress in her coffin by lying still on a mortuary bed of red silk sheets and cushions, surrounded by white roses and holding a bouquet on her lap with both hands. To match the character, the music now resembles more a cathedral organ playing a slow fuge or requiem. As usual, related imagery and footage alternates with medium and first shots of Wynn talking to the audience.

2.4. Conclusion

In summary, it has been shown how video essays can not only be a source for exposure to philosophy, but a way to do philosophy. Indeed, video essays are the format for the philosophical work of three youtubers. This was achieved by scanning three video essays for the characteristics presented at the end of the first chapter and the concepts of argumentative and expressive dimensions drawn from professor González's proposal (2010). The analysis also made clear that even if there is space for experimentation, no element in these videos is random or accidental, everything contributes to the advancement or presentation of the concepts that the creators are building up to. In that sense, elements of sound, imagery and cinematography gain as much meaning and argumentative weight as the arguments explicitly narrated by the creators, surpassing a mere illustrative role. Another result of this chapter is that, when using video essays as a didactical activity or an assignment in class, the method of analysis deployed here and the characteristics from chapter 1 can become criteria for evaluating the videos produced by the students. This would be an evaluation criteria able to consider all elements in an audiovisual production, regardless of its complexity or duration.

Chapter 3. Pedagogical discussion

The video essay as pedagogical tool

This chapter posits that the creation and -to a lesser extent- consumption of video essays stimulate the development of what Nussbaum calls “abilities needed for democratic life”.

These abilities are associated with the humanities and the arts: the ability to **think critically**; the ability to **transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a “citizen of the world”**; and, finally, the ability to **imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person**. (Nussbaum, 2010, 7. Added bold)

The former is possible thanks to the twofold pedagogical role that this same thinker bestows on arts and humanities in education:

They cultivate **capacities for play and empathy in a general way, and they address particular cultural blind spots**. The first role can be played by works remote from the student’s own time and place, although not just any randomly selected work⁴. The second requires a more pointed focus on areas of social unease. The two roles are in some ways continuous, since the general capacity, developed, makes it far easier to address a stubborn blind spot. (Nussbaum, 2010, 108. Added bold)

When Nussbaum talks about “capacities for play”, she means creativity and imagination. And, in relation to these, capacities to articulate knowledge produced in fields independent from one another -i. e., interdisciplinarity- and abilities for communication must be highlighted. All of these abilities take on great importance when dealing not only with humanistic or artistic ways to approach social issues, but also in innovation and problem solving in economics or knowledge production, or any sphere of human agency for that matter. In this regard, Spencer’s claim that Nussbaum is somewhat inconsistent with herself gains weight, by advocating advocates for more democratic ways to see the world while giving the idea that these can only come from the arts and humanities, neglecting valuable inputs from social sciences or natural or applied sciences, because these are more goal oriented (Spencer, 2014, p.401). Nevertheless, this work does not discuss Nussbaum’s conception, but rather, makes use of it.

⁴ See Kant’s (2013, 67-69) proposal for a curriculum where all areas of knowledge are curated in a manner that leads the students to an understanding of themselves as cosmopolitan citizens, so geography and history are to play a foundational role here. It’s better to take examples from real events than conjuring *ad hoc* imaginary situations.

Considering the above, this chapter starts with a summary of the discussion surrounding the idea of a crisis in humanities as found in Nussbaum (2010). As a result, it will be clear that the crisis is much deeper than the original characterization she starts with, going beyond humanities to reach social relationships and value systems. Indeed, what is at stake is a certain type of citizen holding a certain worldview: the democratic citizen who holds critical thinking, empathy and cosmopolitanism as fundamental ethical principles.

Having gained clarity on what the background for the discussion is and what are the pedagogical goals to be pursued, the use of video essays can be properly oriented. Following that idea, the second section of the chapter justifies in full the selection of the video essays from chapter 2, extrapolating how their potential for developing democratic abilities rests highly on the content and intention of the videos. Therefore, a greater importance has to be placed upon the argumentative dimension than in the structural characteristics presented at the end of chapter 1. Subsequently, the attention is turned towards different conceptions of the possibilities offered by audiovisual production in philosophical, pedagogical and methodological contexts. The great differences between these conceptions of the video essay are breached by showing their compatibility with education for democracy. This tour will complement the initial definition of the video essay given in chapter 1, intentionally making it less normative in character.

One final thing must be made clear. This is only one possible insight on video essays, not a necessary account of how or why they must be used in education. After all, the video essay as portrayed to this point, and it shall seen by the end of this monograph, is a tool that affords a great variety of uses as wide as the creator's needs. The activities of philosophical learning, teaching and production within a democratic framework are one possible use of the video essay tool, not its sole function.

3.1. The crisis in humanities and the endangered democratic citizen

Martha Nussbaum's idea of a crisis in the role humanities play in current democratic societies has been the cornerstone for discussions on education policies and reforms all over the world throughout the last decade. In her 2010 book, *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities*, Nussbaum characterizes this crisis as occurring especially at the institutional level of

education, due to low funding of humanities programs and the progressive elimination of “skills that are needed to keep democracies alive” from schools’ and universities’ curricula (Nussbaum, 2010, p.2). In other words, arts, humanities and the “humanitarian” aspect of science show no quick, measurable and useful results for economic growth, which is why programs for technical abilities are being favored over the former; this, under the idea that the wealth of a country correlates to the wealth of its citizens and the capacity they have to produce capital. However, this is not necessarily true. Rich nations may exhibit just as much economic disparity as developing countries. So, Nussbaum claims, this is not really a disjunctive between an education solely for democracy and one solely for profit, that would be the extreme case. “A flourishing economy requires the same skills that support citizenship” (Ibidem, p.10), those of creativity for problem solving and innovation, and tolerance and unity to avoid and resolve conflicts among members of the social group. It is not as simple as choosing between a poor but just society and a rich but unjust one, given that the same abilities that allow citizens of a democracy to voice their concerns, demands and proposals can foster profitable consequences in business contexts, but too much emphasis on the profitable side will lead to anti-democratic relations. In consequence, the crisis is the neglect of arts and humanities in education systems, because their subjects and skills are not directly tied to the production of wealth. With this neglect comes as well a scarcity in practices and spaces where the skills needed for democratic life are addressed, taught and developed: critical thinking, cosmopolitan worldview and the ability to sympathetically imagine ourselves “in the somebody’s else’s shoes”.

Acevedo & Prada-Dussán (2017) take Nussbaum’s idea further, arguing that the crisis marks the consolidation of a worldview based on the technification of knowledge (*los saberes*), in which all knowledge production is broken down into the set of practical abilities required to produce it. If these abilities can be used for the economic growth of a nation, that field of knowledge is considered valuable, but only because of the instrumentalization of its elements. Conversely, all knowledge deemed not profitable or potentially unprofitable is denied opportunities and resources for production and growth, and it can even be eliminated from institutional plans. This results in a divorce between the nation 's economic growth and “las personas en concreto, sus diversos contextos vitales y comunidades de sentido” (Acevedo &

Prada-Dussán, 2017, p.34). Nonetheless, what the authors seem to be building up to, but not quite getting at, is that all knowledge forms of knowledge not directly tied to applied science, technical abilities and technological improvements capable of optimizing chains of production will gradually disappear. Consequently, for Acevedo and Prada-Dussán, the crisis is not exclusive to arts and humanities, but all forms of knowledge. It follows that all industries in a nation will be at a disadvantage any time their import or outsourcing proves cheaper than domestic production, jeopardizing the financial situation of the nation's citizens. Nussbaum hints at this when declaring that the "humanitarian aspect of science" is also at risk, due to the fact that this crisis is caused by the one in humanitie's skills for democratic life, which find appliance not only into the humanities or political life, but in industry. Whether or not there really is such a crisis is beyond the scope of this investigation, but if there is, it cannot be exclusive to humanities.

The previous gives rise to a much more poignant matter, the type of person that an education focused on democratic values seeks to form *vs* the one resulting from an education more concerned with profit. The latter seems to be capable of increasing their own and their country's wealth in the short term, but less keen on establishing deep and meaningful relations with other citizens or willing to look inwards to evaluate what they believe. Conversely, a person brought up in an environment more concerned with democratic values, spaces and times that allow the exercise of the abilities for democratic life will have a voice capable of dissent, debate and the inclination towards thoughtful political participation. The neglect of arts and humanities in the measures taken to pursue economic profit is causing a disregard for what Nussbaum calls "soul", "the faculties of thought and imagination that make us human and make our relationships rich human relationships, rather than relationships of mere use and manipulation." (Nussbaum, 2010, p.10).

It is worth digging deeper into John Dewey's influence over Nussbaum, particularly, his emphasys of activity over passivity in the classroom and how that is the way to construct citizenship. The basic idea that Nussbaum brings from Dewey's work is that critical thinking must go hand to hand with technical skills that allow children to have starting points from where

to inquire. These skills would be developed through assignments that require cooperative work as well and creativity from the students, instead of a passive assignment where they receive unquestionable information from the teacher (Nussbaum, 2010, p.66). Here, we hear echoes of chapter 1. The fitness of video essays as formats that allow the exploration and expression of personal identity and beliefs, lead us to think that making video essays can be directed from a Deweyian perspective. And, due to the amount of smaller labours in which the production of a video essay can be divided, this can easily be turned into a group assignment. In this way, students begin to be familiar with the perks of association and cooperation from their early ages. Which, in turn, prepares them for democratic life, that demands the maximization of cooperation and direction towards common interests and flexibility in action, interaction and association (Dewey, 1995, p.78). It is inevitable to have to work together towards common goals with others who we probably don't know and sort out conflicts that arise from apparently incompatible worldviews. So it is best to do it from a disposition of adaptability. In a democracy like this, everyone's voice is equally valid, since we all assume that by belonging to the same group and cooperating towards the same goals, the actions of all influence everyone's lives (Tiles, 1995). Participation in social life is, thus, not reduced to a set of mechanisms consigned in the law, but it is an *ethos* of shared responsibility. It follows that for Dewey, in a way that clearly influences Nussbaum, democracy is the best way of association, because members of a democratic society work cooperatively for the completion of shared interests because they have the right to be free from the imposition of an external will, be it from an individual or an institution. And is over that same basis of cooperation that democratic citizens interact with other groups. So there is also a considerable amount of positive influence between groups every time their members interact, granting a clear cosmopolitan turn to Dewey's conception.

In summary, Nussbaum is concerned with the possibility of losing the capacity to see each other as equals. And, since the conception of equality is one of the basis for democratic life, the very existence of democracy is at stake. Democracy is not here seen only as a type of government, but as a way of living, a certain manner in which to build relationships with others and how to see oneself. Nevertheless, for Dewey this relates to the very nature of association and agency as building blocks of social ontology, whereas Nussbaum -without going as deep as

Dewey- seems to think that democratic societies exist, but their mechanisms for empowering individuals need protection and preservation through education. Nussbaum relies more heavily on institutions.

What is potentially at stake with this crisis in humanities is a citizen who holds two values as fundamental principles for social life: empathy and cosmopolitanism. The first is required to ensure care and good relations among citizens of the same group and the second to be able to extend this feeling towards the whole of humanity. Thus, preventing conflict among citizens of the same or different societies. It is precisely this cosmopolitanism that is imperative for today's world, given that we all depend on or are affected by events abroad and virtually all countries are multi-ethnic. So "young people must gradually come to understand the differences that make understanding difficult between groups and nations, and the shared human needs and interests that make understanding essential if common problems are to be solved" (Nussbaum, 2010, 81). Gaining consciousness of the latter, will result in seeing each other as equal beings, desiring beings, whose individual powers are insufficient to achieve the goals they set, leading to cooperation, empathy and unity. And for this to happen, arts and humanities need to be given their rightful place in education, as disciplines where children learn and exercise their abilities for democratic life.

3.2. Where is philosophy in all this?

Philosophy is one of the fields where this crisis is more evident. Philosophers have always struggled to explain why it is important to do what they do, mostly because their investigations are clearly not aimed at profit or palpable goals. But in a world based on technification for profit, the disdain for philosophy becomes ever clearer, with governments and institutions considering its partial or complete removal from their classrooms. A significantly concerning event is the elimination of philosophy from the curriculum of Mandatory Secondary Education (ESO, in Spanish) in Spain, being replaced by ethics, values and entrepreneurship (Zafra, Sept 21, 2021). Even natural scientists and public intellectuals claim that theoretic and experimental natural sciences have made philosophy obsolete. There are also plenty of examples of public intellectuals doubting the value philosophy might have to contemporary societies or

politicians straight up denying it has any value at all⁵. The message seems clear: behave, but do not let questioning get in the way of producing profit.

It is also common to see every now and then columns written by philosophy professors attempting to justify to their fellow citizens what it is that they do and why it is important. Usually, these apologetic articles posit arguments similar to Nussbaum's, defending philosophy by highlighting its political importance in the formation of critical citizens that can check on and call-out political institutions in their countries, contributing to a more fair society and the guarding of democratic rights (Pachón, 2019). Others (Ávila, 2017) agree with Nussbaum in that framing the question about philosophy's role over the basis of use value is misguided. This framing is too narrow, for many things have value in themselves or because they have a special influence on someone, but are plain useless in terms of use value. Philosophy is one of such things that can provide tools to impact people's lives and identities. Depending on their interests, they might be able to use philosophy to obtain innovative or more cunning approaches to matters of their interest or nurture their fields of knowledge. On the other hand, philosophy can simply be valuable to someone on an abstract level, i.e., they value knowledge for knowledge's sake.

Nevertheless, philosophy, being a generally academic practice, can be accused of not being for everyone, of being intentionally exclusionary of those outside universities and of having little to no impact beyond the seminars, lectures and journals produced in them. It is commonplace to find critiques about hyper-specialization within questions about what philosophy does -although that question can be made to all theoretical disciplines, as they seem

⁵ For an example of this posture see: Dawkins, R. & Degrasse, T. (September 28, 2010). *The Poetry of Science* [conference]. The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. Crampton Auditorium, Howard University, Washington DC. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RExQFZzHXQ&t=0s>. Regarding the issue of reducing admission or eliminating certain programmes from universities in order to tackle employability, see: Barnés, H. (February 25, 2020). ¿Eliminar carreras de letras para que haya menos parados? España abre el debate: ¿Debería la administración premiar las carreras que generan más empleo y limitar las plazas de las que tienen menos inserción? El debate está abierto. *El Confidencial*, educación. https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/2020-02-25/menos-carreras-letras-menos-paro-universidad_2468248/. For an example of a politician denying the value of philosophy, see: *El Universal*, educación. (November 5 2016). Manolo Duque genera nueva polémica al decir que la filosofía no sirve. <https://www.eluniversal.com.co/cartagena/manolo-duque-genera-nueva-polemica-al-decir-que-la-filosofia-no-sirve-239422-DXEU347602>.

to be too specialized for a broad public. There is an image of the intellectual as a person isolated from society (generally a university professor), disregarding mundane events in order to produce texts understandable only to a community of people equally out of touch as them. It would appear as if doing philosophy required that degree of social isolation and expertise that sometimes not even undergraduate students can achieve. And, of course, since intellectuals seem to be locked up in libraries or offices studying complicated texts, they have little to no time for trends, fashion and worldly events. Those, of course, are caricatures of what academic philosophy actually is. However, they point at two problems that do plague it: relatively difficult access to professionally produced philosophical material and the scarce diffusion it has beyond the departments and niches where it is created.

Using the video essay format allows for four responses to the criticisms above. 1) philosophical video essays escape the problem of access to educational material, endemic to institutions: by belonging to an extracurricular environment, they have a wider and more appealing diffusion and coverture than specialized literature or courses offered by schools and universities. 2) Thanks to this, they show that philosophical reflection is pertinent to today's world, as it provides much needed resources to approach current political, cultural and social phenomena and events. Furthermore, 3) we can take Acevedo and Prada-Dussán's (2017) proposal and apply it to video essays as philosophical texts. So video essays indeed train the creator's sensibility to reconnect with their beliefs, contexts and experiences and their ability to express such things. This is another way to say that creating video essays requires the creator to think critically, which can lead to sympathy for the situation of their peers and a wider perspective, not limited to their own or that of their immediate group. Moreover, it can be said, quite pragmatically, Sarukkai (2017) that it is not so much a question of how useful philosophy can be, but 4) how it can be applicable and where and when it makes its appearance. Philosophy appears, for instance, in politics when discussing and demanding representation, participation, identity or justice. It also appears in religion, as many theological and mystic discussions overlap with ethical questions on how to live and ontological ones about what the nature of events and things are. Philosophy appears too in education, as the latter implies a decision of what, when and how to teach. Consequently, Dewey's claim that philosophy is preliminary to education and

is pedagogical in its intentions holds valid: education is the realization and test of philosophy (Dewey 1995, p.276). Philosophy is the theoretical practice where the concepts that will later ground educational practices are outlined, generated and discovered. This is, philosophy produces the meanings that will give teaching direction. In turn, the *praxis* of these concepts develops them, tests them and reconfigures the experience of everyone involved. Slowly, but surely, transforming society as a whole.

Philosophy, then, slips through the cracks of pop culture. Not only can the growth in videos and blog entries reviewing and analyzing films, literary works, artworks, memes, and so on be confirmed, but many of these works present their audience with philosophical concepts or different worldviews, albeit in a very subtle and toned down manner. Exposure to philosophy, arts and knowledge in general can come, thus, from YouTube videos analyzing the latest blockbusters, fashion trends and cultural phenomena, as well as the consumption of pop culture and media. Examples of this can be seen every time one logs into YouTube to find successful channels devoted to the production of such kind of argumentative/educational content. Furthermore, it can be understood now a much broader potential of video essays, both in their consumption and their making. This potential will be explored more carefully in short.

3.3. On the consumption of video essays

The two roles Nussbaum assigned to arts and humanities in pedagogy are separate only in their examination, as are the three abilities for democratic life she also posits. Ultimately, it is impossible to separate the approach to socio-political or personal issues from the exercise of creativity and empathy when seeking to form a citizen in accordance with Nussbaum's thought. As a result, there is no need to think of separate activities for the development of creativity for empathy, critical thought and a cosmopolitan worldview. The only thing that is needed is the correct content to be given to the activities and materials used in the pedagogical practice.

The definition of video essays constructed in chapter 1, particularly the list of characteristics, is structural, it denotes a form audiovisual productions must have and things they must do in order to be considered video essays. As such, the potential they hold for furthering the

abilities for democratic life rests upon the content and intention they are given by their creators or by the use they have in a teacher's class. As all essays, video essays ought to be critical thought enacted. They help to organize, precise and limit the boundaries of one's beliefs. Philosophical video essays will be particularly fit for the exercise of critical thought, as this discipline rests upon that activity. Critical thinking is an integral part of doing philosophy. In consequence, all pedagogical activities designed to teach philosophy will require students to exercise a great deal of critical thought to the best of their capacities. It doesn't matter if the pedagogical activity takes the form of a debate, writing a text, interpreting a text, film, work of art, composing questions or answering them, they all demand critical thought. It must not be forgotten that one of the core characteristics of video essays is that a greater importance is placed on the argumentative dimension than on the expressive or mechanical. That is what separates them from a more artistic view of the format and video art. In that sense, there must never come a moment when a philosophy teacher assigns their students with creating a video essay with no other clear instructions, or separated from a specific discussion determined by the class' syllabus. This would be disorganized, chaotic and will have little or no pedagogical value for the teaching philosophy, as students would not be inclined to exercise any specific ability, make use of any devices, information or knowledge they have at their disposal. Some of the final products might even be aesthetically pleasing, but most would not have any value at all, because the students were adrift on how to use the resources at their disposal. Part of the role of the teacher is to give the students direction.

On that thought, the videos examined in the second chapter make clear that video essays are excellent for tackling socio-political issues of the present day, but they also show that by producing counterarguments to one's standpoint, it is possible to comprehend the situation others are in and enrich both perspectives; hopefully, overcoming disputes. At a wider level, video essays provide evidence that problematic political and social practices of our society also take place abroad. And that these situations are so diverse in nature demands the use of interdisciplinarity in their assessment and solution. The contents of all three videos analyzed in chapter 2 show the integration of knowledge and resources not limited to a philosophical origin. History archives, journalism, demographics, sociology, art, political theory and even economic

theory are intertwined by the creators in order to carry on with their proposals and make sense of the world they live in. What follows is an attempt to further develop the concepts present in those videos, using them in a way directed by and consequent with the abilities for democracy proposed by Nussbaum.

* * *

Following the same order as before, this section must begin with *Brexit*. Thorn's video is of particular interest to this monograph not only because democratic citizenship is the core of the crisis of humanities, but also because this video uses the Brexit referendum of 2016 as an example of the limitations inherent to democratic societies. This exam fits almost perfectly to the referendum for the peace process with the FARC-EP guerrilla in Colombia, that also took place in 2016. It can be argued that in Thorn's video, there are tools useful for a better analysis of the Colombian referendum, given that it was also plagued with misinformed political participation, political sabotage and the marginalizations of the sectors that had most at stake.

Thorn argues that at the time of the Brexit referendum only 71.2% of the British population was composed of registered voters. Nevertheless, the turnout to the polls means that only 51.3% of the general population voted on the referendum, with 26.6% voting "LEAVE" and 24.7% voting "STAY". In a nutshell, 26.6% of the UK's population decided for the other 73.4% (Thorn, 2019, 12:37). This becomes more complex in the cases of Scotland and Northern Ireland, where the majority voted to stay in the Union. Not only are the results disproportionate in their representation, but also reignite ethnic tensions that had been meticulously addressed in the past, making the situation look once again as a case of English imperialism nullifying Scottish and Irish sovereignty. There is another matter for the Irish and for the people living in the isles of the English Channel. They must now face travel bans and trade restrictions across borders where they could move and trade freely before. In contrast, people from inland England would not feel the most palpable effects immediately, and so they would believe the referendum had virtually no consequences to daily lives. It is in this other aspect of the situation that Thorn focuses, how the marketing for the "LEAVE" campaign consisted in arguing for the recovery of British sovereignty and self-determination over the rest of Europe (Thorn, 2019, 1:07). Looking

closely, the campaign drew heavily on the idea of a glorification of past autonomy and a position of power over Europe. The Campaign provoked panic over an alleged threat to the very existence of Britishness, posed by the economic dependency on European products, markets and the immigration of non-british. So, even if sovereignty can be an excuse to increase people's participation in the running of their society, it degenerated rapidly into an array of xenophobia and a show of force before the eyes of imaginary opponents. Many voters saw their participation influenced by this type of propaganda, refusing to inform themselves properly or even at all on what actually was Britain's relation to the EU. They considered that by voting "LEAVE" they were regaining control over the affairs of their land, when in reality they had been tricked into a position whose effects they really didn't understand (Euronews, 2021).

Thorn's analysis of the Brexit referendum allows one to ask for Colombia how representative the victory of the country's will the victory of the "NO" is. An analysis of the votes analogue to Thorn's is in order. There were around 46'830.116 persons living in Colombia in 2016 (DANE, 2020). Of those, 34'899.945 were registered voters, but the turnout was just 12'808.858 valid votes (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, 2016). "NO" won with 6'424.385 (50.23%) votes and "YES" lost with 6'363.989 (49.76%) (EL TIEMPO, 2016). Now, just as it was the case with the British referendum, political propaganda had great influence over voters, and just as in the British scenario, these campaigns used lies and inflammatory speech to target the prejudices and fears of many of them. Inflammatory tweets, Whatsapp messages and at unreliable news articles claimed that Communism was going to take over the country, that Venezuela would invade, that private property would be banned and taken away and that homosexuality would be enforced upon children through school reforms. The referendum for a peace treaty with a specific guerrilla group resulted in extreme polarization of the country's population over issues completely unrelated to the peace process. It can even be said that in the end, people didn't really vote for or against the peace process. Is a vote legitimate when voters didn't inform themselves properly, basing their vote on fear and prejudice? How well does this referendum represent the interests of victims or refugees, who are clearly more affected by this peace process than people who did not experience the violence directly? The Colombian situation is also akin to the British in this regard, as those more directly affected by the results

and background of the referendum had a better understanding of what it really was about, but lost the election anyway. “YES” to the peace won in all zones of the country where the conflict was present in full scale, whereas “NO” dominated the urbanized center of the country, where the population never really noticed the war other than by a heavy influx of displaced refugees (CNN Español, Oct. 3 2016). The population not directly connected to the conflict fell prey to demagogues more easily, because they had a more difficult time fact checking the avalanche of information they received. In the end, did any vote count at all when the peace treaty was signed anyways by at-the-time President Santos and FARC-EP former commander Rodrigo Londoño?

Thorn’s video is, then, an example of the epistemic resistance she posits, which can be seen as an attempt to overcome a mentality of local and individual loyalties. Just as Thorn calls for a better informed political participation and questions the legitimacy of the Brexit referendum, her analysis permits to question the results of the Referendum For Peace in Colombia and the way it was framed. The video also allows sympathy for the situation of the British people, thanks to Thorn’s exposition of democracy and the characterization of the uncertainty and confusion felt by UK citizens, their feelings of remorse and frustration in the aftermath of the referendum. Through Thorn’s video, Colombian viewers come to understand and experience how other people in a faraway country face similar ordeals as theirs. If anything, the results of both referendums, with the two sides being so evenly matched, show not that one side must triumph over the other no matter what, but that the issue in particular is too delicate to be solved by a simple “yes” or “no” question. These referendums point to the necessity of dialogue among opposing factions so that common ground can be established. The two nations would have benefited from simpler, more honest and grounded discussions that made visible the concerns of everyone. This would have, in turn, allowed for the dismantling of hate speeches, fake news, and the de-escalation of tensions produced by them. The result would have been a better grasp of the situation and unity of the people, or at least tolerance and understanding of opposing opinions. The result would have been a more democratic community, with citizens and groups having disposition for listening to each other in a more fraternal, honest way, without the fear of extermination of their faction.

* * *

The theme of how difficult it is to deal with inflammatory rhetoric, and how dangerous it is for a democracy, finds an example in Quetzal's *El marxismo cultural no existe*. This video tackles the issue of political propaganda deliberately misinforming people to make them more manipulable, fearful and aggressive, so they are politically docile masses of supporters. Political debates turn into brawls full of *ad hominem* and straw-man fallacies. Viewers of Quetzal's *El Marxismo Cultural No Existe* will no longer be tempted to use the term "cultural marxism" in political conversation, and will be aware and prepared to engage those who do. These viewers will be more careful with their choice of words, the way they speak and voice their political concerns. Furthermore, that video was chosen because of its similarity with some terms originated and used in Colombian politics, such as *Castrochavismo*⁶ and *gender ideology* [*ideología de género*]. A citizen capable of informed and honest political discussion who demands the same standards for those they engage with is one that exemplifies Nussbaum's idea on the value of argument and critical thinking in a healthy democracy.

Now, Nussbaum claims that people with unexamined opinions become extremely influenciabile (2010, p.49). Since they have no clarity about what they consider to be important, it is easy for others to impose their priorities onto them. Of that we got an example with the analysis of Thorn's video and the parallels between the British and Colombian referendum campaigns. Powerful political groups within Colombian society seized the opportunity to impose their will onto people molded into irreflexive, heavily partialized citizens; be it because they received an education for profit, one that kept socio-economic groups segregated or none at all. Nevertheless, that lack of clarity in opinion is perfectly encapsulated by users of terms such as "cultural marxism", "*castrochavismo*", "narco-terrorism", "gender ideology" or "*gente de bien*" [people of good]. These terms function as empty boxes, as straw men, labels to indicate how they see themselves and those with different opinions. Sadly, the meaning of these terms is often prejudice, fear and ignorance. For instance, "cultural marxism" is often taken as "people who

⁶ This term has declined in use, with politicians and news correspondents now favoring narco-terrorism and vandalism, identifying dissent to hegemonic opinions with the felonies such as rebellion, terrorism, drug trafficking, gang-violence, organized crime, and the like.

could steal my property and leave me to my luck”, and “gender ideology” is regarded as “Me or people close to me will be forced to become homosexuals or become victims of sexual abuse.” And this is not something a citizen brought up in democratic education would fear or think.

At their core, what the use of *cliché* terms seems to convey is a worldview not necessarily correspondent or preoccupied for the actual state of affairs in the world, a narrative by which the user makes sense of social and political relations and events that would require strong intellectual effort to understand properly, which would also require much more care and thought regarding the actions taken with those beliefs as motives. This would explain why users of such terms react so aggressively when confronted, because their whole way of thinking, behaving and acting feels under attack and they would have to start thinking about themselves as antagonists, the guilty “bad guys” of the story they tell themselves.

However, there appears to be more to it than just individual responsibility over what terms we use when talking about politics. As seen in Quetzal’s video, *clichés* such as “cultural marxism” are tools for political propaganda. Their goal is to gain support from large portions of the population and gain control over their behavior and the undermining of opposing factions. This is achieved by creating a sense of threat, a public enemy and a separation of “us vs. them”. *Clichés* always seem to be coined by people in highly influential positions -political party spokesmen, politicians, social leaders, etc. - in the midst of political campaigns. For instance, “cultural marxism” was coined by the Nazi party to prey on the vulnerability of the german population that felt defeated, cheated and threatened by foreign powers during the late 1920’s and early 30’s. The term inserts the narrative of an international jewish-soviet conspiracy to destroy The West (what was left of the Prussian Empire), fueling and cementing already existing antisemitic, anti-russian and nationalistic sentiments. People who felt already threatened or angry about jewish communities thriving amidst a german misery and about the possibility of communism taking over, quickly embraced germanic autonomy and racial homogeneity suddenly found a group to adhere to, one that represented their apparent interests and addressed their direct fears (sadly, for the worst): Suddenly they had someone to blame, a visible, palpable

source of their sorrows and tragedies; so if they eliminated those foreign agents of evil, they would also stop german suffering.

Nowadays, there are plenty of examples of this, from Donald Trump's "fake news" and his "hordes of criminal Mexican immigrants" to Colombian *castrochavismo* and "gender ideology". Going back to the previous discussion about the Colombian and the Brexit referendums, it appears that groups in positions of power in each country manipulated the public opinion by spreading or reinforcing this rhetoric, seeking to create an erratic state of decision making. In Colombia, at least, the peace process -fully and faithfully implemented- was guaranteed to have disrupted much of the power held by economic and political elites, because it would have exposed the illegitimate ways in which some acquired and held it. *Clichés* are dangerous not only because they make honest dialogue almost impossible, but ultimately because they are contrary to democratic life itself. The use of these terms robs people of their political agency through repetition and vagueness, getting them fixed on a monolithic set of beliefs. The legitimacy of political participation and representation can be doubted when the population has been manipulated to such extremes that are blind and so profoundly unconcerned with reality.⁷ Furthermore, the use of these kinds of terms seeks unity and homogeneity through violent elimination of differences. The former leads to an utter elimination of empathy towards others, a total inability to consider the world from the point of view of others, because it is perceived as incorrect and even unthinkable. And with that, the possibility for a cosmopolitan worldview is also gone, replaced by loyalty to the faction.

It is a titanic endeavour to try to combat these political hand grenades. For starters, safe spaces must be created, where honest, transparent conversations between equals can occur, without factions trying to impose their interests over the others'. This would, on one hand,

⁷ Although there might be similarities between *cliché* terms used as political propaganda and what Harry Frankfurt considers *bullshit*, they are not the same. According to Frankfurt (2005), the essence of bullshit is an absence of concern for truth when one speaks, so the words uttered cannot be regarded either as lies or truths, they communicate nothing at all nor deceive us about the state of the world. Rather, the goal of bullshit is to give the bullshitter a specific appearance. On the contrary, the aim of *clichés* in politics is to persuade people of accepting and fervently defending a certain narrative of how things are, and getting them to act accordingly. Yes, there is no regard for the truth value of the things said, but there is a substantial concern for making them appear truthful.

provide an opportunity to mend the fractures in our communities, making their worldviews-as Dewey proposed - less exclusionary and far more flexible, fit for critique and actualization. On the other hand, the public space can become one of horizontal relations, not a gallery for inequality. This would also change the way in which politics are carried out, given that representatives would not be scrambling over influence and voters at all costs, but providing safe spaces for the construction of a more horizontal community. Something like that can be achieved -at an institutional level -by focusing political practice more on the legislative branch than on the executive one, since Congress and Councils are primarily organizations for discussion and debate, whereas mayors, governors and presidents operate under a more vertical hierarchy. All the above, coupled with a democratic system of education, would provide the citizens with ways of interacting less aggressively towards difference, allowing for the construction of community. Perhaps then Quetzal and Yukiko's interaction would not have resulted in a gruesome deathmatch, but in mutual trust, understanding and overcoming of fears. Perhaps then Yukiko could have seen the world for what it was instead of what she had been led to believe.

* * *

Finally, when it comes to Contrapoints, there are other videos that better showcase Nussbaum's idea for art in democracy, especially her period of socratic dialogues and her [video about incels](#). These videos function better as personifications of different -most times conflicting- points of view testing the limits of one another. In those videos, it is easier for the viewer to see the efforts for a thorough understanding of someone else's position, with every character having the opportunity to present their position, answering to all sorts of criticisms the other characters can make to it. However, since most of these socratic-dialoguish videos have precisely that kind of narrative element in their expressive dimensions -they pretty much tell the story of the encounter of some characters interacting-, they can hardly be considered video essays, if we are to remain faithful to our initial definition of the genre. Now, *Opulence* deals with present matters that would not seem to be so philosophically charged. As such, it creatively addresses a particular cultural blindspot: the glorification of opulence and the defence of economic disparity it implies. Contrapoints' video rises from a very personal space in the creator's experience of

aesthetic bliss throughout her life and how that led to a specific kind of opulence in her style of dressing, mannerisms and attitudes. It also serves as an analysis of said style by showing the cultural and political implications of contemporary popular aesthetics in relation to power structures and economic disparity. Wynn makes us face uncomfortable points about how a certain type of fashion is a whitewashed appropriation of the struggles of marginalized groups, or the outright opposition to them. In turn, the exam calls for awareness of what is conveyed with aesthetic choices, what identity and aspirations are being presented. Clarity on that would provide control over the image people construct of themselves, but also enough insight into the beliefs that drive fashion trends to judge if they stand by them or not. And that is a premier example of critical thought.

Opulence serves also as an example of sympathetic imagination. When explaining how the phrase “opulence, you own everything” originated in the ballroom subculture of New York black and latino queer communities during the 80’s, Wynn communicates the actual precarity of the people who participated in this culture, and how this phrase served as a fantasy of the wealth and luxury they did not possess, nor will be able to obtain, due to the social and work area discrimination they were victims of (Wynn, 2019, 08:30). In other words, Wynn’s video helps us ask ourselves: “Do we want to become part of an exclusionary privileged elite and continue to deepen the breach between them and an evermore struggling rest of society?”

Contrapoints’ analysis of opulence can be extrapolated to Colombian society, helping to ask what kind of life is aspired by the majority of people with a popular imagination plagued with the promise of a luxurious life and easy money. Colombian society was marked by the way in which drug lords came to acquire an amount of money and power that rivaled that of the ruling classes of the country, sometimes even surpassing it. One of the effects this had over popular culture was the appearance of a “narco-culture” and a “narco aesthetic”, a type of opulence exhibited by members of drug cartels that led them to thoughtlessly flaunt and throw their money away; at the end of the day, it seemed to be endless. One could seriously say they owned everything and everyone. These new riches flooded the cities of Colombia with drugs and violence, but also with extravagant mansions filled with statues, limitless ranches with exotic

animals and parties that lasted days -and were responsible for maintaining a considerable market of sex workers and entertainment industries in our cities. “Excess”, not “Opulence”, seemed to be their motto. It is not claimed that every rich person in Colombia is so because of drug trafficking nor that it is the only way to become rich in this country. Rather, that the culture of excess permeated so deeply that wealth and power tend to be expressed in an ostentatious, excessive and obscene manner. Those who have them usually appear to be above the law. Furthermore, members of drug cartels, just as the new rich in Contrapoints’ video, also came from lower social classes. They also represented a sort of success story in terms of upwards social mobility to the eyes of many Colombians. Nevertheless, the function of these icons is not the same as that of rags to rich celebrities. While the latter make us think that capitalism can work, criminals showed us that it can be tricked. It can even be said that celebrities feed the myth of a law-abiding, regulated capitalist market, while drug cartels symbolize an unrestricted type of capitalism, with vast nets of production chains, uninterrupted demand and no taxation. Consequently, when people emulate a narco-aesthetic, they might appear opulent in the sense signaled by Contrapoint’s, but their opulence is not a simulacrum of the privileges they lack, more than an apology to a despotic way of life and the power of one over the many.

All in all, the concepts presented by these three video essayists have proven fit to think and comprehend different phenomena of Colombian socio-political life. These concepts such as opulence, cultural marxism and the representativity of votes have provided the video essayists and their audience with opportunities to -as Nussbaum would put it- tackle delicate cultural points in their societies. But they have also served to tackle delicate cultural points of Colombian society. Understanding was gained regarding the similarities between situations in Colombia and abroad. A deeper grasp of the dangers of inflammatory speech in political debate was also achieved, both in general and in the case of two akin political episodes. In conclusion, the consumption of video essays can be a useful philosophical didactic. They serve as a source for exposure to philosophical ideas and invite reflection by pointing to the student’s contexts. In doing so, they fulfill the twofold role that Nussbaum gives to artistic material in education and help to exercise some of the abilities needed for democratic life. Furthermore, not only can they be used as activities for students, video essays are a way for professional philosophers to reach

out to the general Colombian public in order to initiate and further discussions on sensitive issues. This is an opportunity for quality education free from the limitations of pedagogical institutions, a way to provide a great amount of people with the resources for critical examination of their country.

3.4. On the creation of video essays

This section applies the same type of analysis present in the previous, now focused on the creation of video essays. Four proposals of how to implement video essays are studied. One as class projects, one as investigation methods, one as a format for philosophical inquiry and one meant to build bridges across academic groups. These proposals are described and examined in light of their potential as pedagogical practices that develop Nussbaum's idea of an education for democracy. This monograph's own conception of the video essay is not discussed here, as it is considered that its links to education for democracy have been thoroughly explored in the pages before. Suffice to reiterate that the link is based upon a conception of the essay as a flexible format to mobilize critical thinking and communication skills. In that sense, it fits mostly any intentions and topics the creator might choose, with the real challenge being how to translate thoughts into images so that the visual elements are not limited to a mere illustrative role.

The first proposal is that of Natalia González Gil. Her thesis has been the most influential academic material for this investigation, reason enough to address it firstly. González' proposal was deliberately kept unexplored during the initial definition of the video essay in chapter 1, because it wasn't possible to give it the attention it deserved without deviating from the central discussion of that chapter.

In her 2018 thesis *Creación de cine ensayístico desde la filosofía como forma de vida* (2018) [*Creation of essayistic film from the standpoint of philosophy as a way of life*], Natalia González claims that the creation of essay films is an example of a philosophical way of life, one devoted to the spiritual exercise of self inquiry aimed for to the transformation of one's practices and customs in pursuit of the best life. In her investigation, González uses the terms "essayistic films" (*cine ensayístico*) and "audiovisual essay" (*ensayo audiovisual*) interchangeably (Íbidem,

p.34, footnote 15), as to encompass all audiovisual creations with essayistic intent. For this reason, her ideas are applicable to this monograph. The definition of the video essay constructed in chapter 1 is heavily influenced by her definition of the essayistic film. However, there is an important difference, González' definition favors the ethical potential and considers the audiovisual essay as a private exercise of reflection, being the ethical intention what gives the film its "essayistic" element, thus distinguishing it from films in general (González, 2018, p.49). The definition given in chapter 1 of this monograph, on the other hand, considers the video essay primarily as a tool for communication. Thus, its emphasis is directed towards the relational aspect of the intention of the creator, the work as a standalone product and the reception of the public; which is precisely where the pedagogical component comes into place. In that sense, video essays, as understood by this monograph, are not spiritual exercises *per se*, so they are not spiritual exercises as Gonzáles deems them. Her acute definition deserves to be quoted *in extenso*:

[...] spiritual exercises are practiced for the transformation of the self; second, they are always done over the basis of a serious philosophical discourse and an integral participation of knowledge (*saberes*); third, they allow the creator to find their own normative principles from many and diverse philosophical discourses; fourth, they enable for thinking, doing and experimenting the same spiritual exercises [as past formats], both proposed by the tradition and those possible in the modern world. I presented the spiritual exercise studied here as discursive inasmuch as it builds meaning and gives an account of one's worldview; dialogic in so far as this discourse is evaluated by discussing with itself; and written in the format of audiovisual essay. Other than this, the exercise does not neglect the body or the sensitivity to approach knowledge, neither blindly tosses aside passions, desires and pleasures in the construction of the good life. This is partially due to the sensible and affective characteristics from which the essay spurs (González, 2018, p.32. Translated from Spanish).

In so far as it points directly to the recorded event or experience and to the concrete thoughts it sparked in the creator, video recording is a place for expression that presents the experience of the creator as faithfully as possible. Consequently, the creation of essay films can be regarded as a reflexive exercise for the "problematization of oneself, where each one identifies the ideas or concepts by which they live in order a later examination, comprehension of their nature and determining if one must take distance from them or strengthen them" (González-Gil, 2018, 45. Translated from Spanish). That is what makes it a spiritual exercise that enhances sensibility (*potencializa la sensibilidad*). Every time footage is recorded, the person

recording is paying full attention to the event, they are completely immersed in the experience we had. The person reflects upon that past experience once again when editing the recorded material, organizing it into a narrative that provides sense to the raw experience. However, this organization is not mandatory, the creator can always re-edit the material, adding, subtracting, repeating, pausing, highlighting different elements each time (González, 2018, p.51). Furthermore, there are yet more opportunities to revisit the past everytime the finished product is watched, only that these are reading-like exercises, instead of creative ones.

Even though González' proposal is not pedagogical, her very point is also made by Acevedo & Prada-Dussán's (2017) proposal: the writing of philosophical texts enables its creator to reconnect with their beliefs, contexts and experiences and their ability to express such things through their sensibility. Everything, from the writing style to the concepts and the text' structure, must obey that principle of self discovery and awareness of one's position in the world, i.e., they must enhance the creator's sensibility. And, since in chapters 1 and 2 video essays were consolidated as potentially philosophical texts, the same argument applies to this audiovisual format. Furthermore, as it gives the opportunity to pinpoint and exemplify the values one holds as ethical principles, it is very easy to conceive the creation of video essays or film essays as oriented towards critical thought, cosmopolitanism and sympathetic imagination.

The latter was precisely what the second example, teacher María Dolores Arcoba (2020), confirmed when assigning the creation of a short video essay to her highschool students. The piece was to be used as meditation upon an experience of their daily routine. The assignment concluded that the video essay is a vehicle for the construction and search of identities, a subject of special importance when working with adolescent students. Thus, Arcoba's students not only solidified the knowledge on contemporary art formats learned in class by linking it to their personal lives, but they also had to pay close attention to mundane parts of their lives never before put in question. The result was a reconfiguration in the way they were seeing and understanding their bodies, group identity, gender, etc. In this sense, videos resulting from this assignment became self portraits of the students. They had to take critical positions, or at least pay attention to, on things as common as their hair routine, the practice of musical instruments or

the process of putting contact lenses on. It is important to remember that this assignment was given as final work for the course. Which means that the students had already been instructed in some of the themes, formats and techniques of contemporary art creation that were applied to the assignment. But also that the project was not at all isolated from the intention and contents of the class' curriculum.

The third example is the *Café Kathédra* project by the Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, in México. This project shows that video essays can be given a place in universities, even as an extracurricular platform to encourage intellectual production using technologies of information and communication. Above all, this project intends to create a platform where members of different faculties can have horizontal dialogue. Following that, the talk-show format has been the choice, seeing as it provides an environment for casual and intimate conversation, but doing it with “didactical-pedagogical spirit and enough sources of information” (Pesci-Gaytán & Guerrero-Sandoval, 2019, p.9). *Café Kathédra* leads to consider academic events and publications that exploit the format of video essays other than art exhibitions, congresses and galleries. More importantly, it constitutes an attempt to offer spaces where members of a community can gain cohesion, bound and strengthen existing relations inside their group or craft new ones.

The fourth and final example is the conception of García-Roldán (2020). This author posits video essays as a method for investigation-creation in arts, humanities and education in general. According to this posture, video essays are primarily experimental and flexible productions that enable creators to both construct and put into motion the ideas they are presenting, i.e., to test, rehearse and try them out. This is because the creator must not only communicate the idea most precisely, but also show it through the audio and visual elements that compose the video, they must show the world as seen through this idea. Nonetheless, video essays also require action from the viewers. On the side of the spectator, they are picking up on the hints and piecing them together as they watch the video. Thus, video essays function at a triple level, as instruments, as processes and as messages, being this tripartite feature that enables them to outstrip mere passive or illustrative roles that artworks tend to be given in classrooms.

García-Roldán expands this conception of the video essay in his doctoral thesis by defining it as having 1) an open structure, often casual, where the author 2) outlines their impressions on whatever subject they are reflecting upon without any specific unity or cohesion, resulting in 3) many of the elements being bound by spontaneous, rhetorical, ideological or symbolic references to one another (García-Roldán, 2012, p.256). In that sense, García-Roldán's is a rather discursive, improvisational and private conception of the video essay. It favors spontaneous association because it visually translates the course of thought when reflecting and meditating. An extreme version of this conception would make video essays completely indistinguishable from video art than philosophical texts, as they would gravitate more towards visual poetry than explicit argumentation. However, García-Roldán's idea of the video essay can also be applicable to the videos looked at in chapter 2, with a more moderate take on his conception of this format. It can be claimed that the creators of those videos conducted their research in order to be presented as video essays. Moreover, the productions they released can be examined in various levels of depth, challenging viewers to interpret all semiotic elements within them, but are direct enough in the delivery of their message as to not leave viewers adrift in the search for a definitive interpretation. Furthermore, the fact that there are dedicated YouTubers with a steady production of videos can be seen as the way in which these thinkers publish their work.

3.4. Conclusion

In summary, democratic societies face the danger of losing official spaces where the abilities needed to maintain them are taught, developed and strengthened. This danger results from the precarization of the situation of arts and humanities in pedagogical institutions under the modern paradigm of economic profit as the predominant social goal. This is where video essays appear as a response to the issue. Given their flexibility, video essays can be used as tools with which to promote an education for democracy. It does not matter if this is explicitly acknowledged by those involved in the creation of the videos or if these videos are part of an institution's curriculum. Regardless of the fact that different conceptions of the video essay are not directly focused on developing the values and abilities for democratic life, or even on their

use in education, they serve as pedagogical and philosophical activities in their own right. Their applicability as tools for democratic education rests upon the intention they are given. Some conceptions lean more to personal experiences of reflection, while others gravitate fully towards their place and possibilities in the classrooms. In the end, they all share the core characteristics of critical thought exercises that allow both creators and viewers more clarity in their beliefs and opinions.

Conclusions

Having finished the monograph, three main conclusions can be stated. Firstly, video essays can be defined as a format of audiovisual productions that have, overall, an argumentative intention. As such, they make use of visual, sound, narrative, academic, argumentative, rhetorical and bibliographic elements within an essayistic structure of introduction, body/core and conclusion. The goal of this type of production can be to justify and persuade of a belief (in which case they are propositive) or to present different points of view surrounding a specific topic (in this case, they are exploratory). Video essays, as defined here, present the following characteristics: An argumentative intention, greater importance is placed on the argumentative dimension and the structure of the argumentation, pedagogical interest, easy access, Breaking of the fourth wall, cheap production, hypertextuality.

Second, drawing from professor González' proposal (2010), a method for analyzing audiovisual productions was adapted and applied to three video essays in a case study in chapter 2. With this, the potential that video essays hold for philosophical production and teaching, as well as the characteristics that were outlined in chapter 1, were confirmed. This method can be used both as criteria for evaluation or assign it to students as an activity for the dissection and analysis of video essays. Additionally, in a situation such as the virtual education that the Covid-19 pandemic forced upon institutions around the globe, video essays can be used as learning or teaching activities where students articulate what they have learned in ways alternative to questionnaires or written assignments. Video essays are also an option for teachers not to extrapolate the traditional lecture method to a videoconference, but this is also dependent on their technological literacy and, of course, the time and equipment they are given to prepare classes.

Third, video essays find justification as didactic and pedagogical tools within the frame of education for democracy, as proposed by Martha Nussbaum. As with all philosophical endeavors, philosophical video essays would favor the ability for critical thinking more directly and explicitly than those of sympathetic imagination and a cosmopolitan disposition towards social phenomena. Video essays are a format for audiovisual production that can be used as the

creator requires. As such, they present a series of features that enable creators to have different layers of meaningful elements from which to communicate and convey the message they seek to express. Taken just for this, there is nothing intrinsically democratic about them. Nevertheless, whether the approach to video essays comes as viewers or creators, their potential as tools for a democratic education rests upon the intention with which they are used. There is testimony of this in the different conceptions of the video essay that were analyzed in the last section of the third chapter. This is also the point where most of the literature conveys. Whether it is viewed as an act of meditation with ethical goals, an exercise through which to gain awareness of the context one exists in or even as a format for investigation-creation, the making of video essays requires the abilities of attention to an issue, thorough understanding of its elements, comprehension of the limitations of one's and other people's point of view on the subject and the reaching of a conclusion englobing what was constructed. All of which demands flexibility and audacity from the creator, the ability to effectively seize the resources at their disposal, whether they are mechanical, theoretical, academic, practical, digital, sources of information, etc. That process will, consequently, make the creator aware of the similarities between their situation and that from other people's, rendering that there are not only differences among individuals, and creating a feeling of mutual and shared experience.

Thusly defined, the video essay appears to be a tool with plenty of didactic and pedagogical potential. Outside the boundaries of academia, it shows a capacity for diffusion unparalleled by its written counterpart. The success of YouTube channels like *Contrapoints* or *Philosophy Tube*, with subscribers counting in the millions or at least hundreds of thousands, can be traced to their choice of subjects and the aesthetic spectacles they present them in. If used as a tool for teaching in an environment that favors horizontal relations among students themselves and teachers, the video essay becomes a versatile format that allows students to articulate and integrate what they have learned with situations from personal, academic and public life. For instance, assignments of open questions that demand consulting what they have learned in different classes with different teachers. The creation of video essays can also integrate their

personal electronic devices into academic life, resulting in another use for them other than entertainment; also enabling audiovisual literacy.

Regarding video essays produced outside of curricular contexts, these can be used as supportive material for a specific class or subject, making their consumption an interpretative exercise much like assignments of analyzing literary works. All this goes hand in hand with exercising the students' abilities for communication and critical thinking.

This monograph does not strive for video essays to replace other pedagogical resources or roots for a teaching practice based solely on audiovisual content, its intention was to shed some light on the possibilities offered by a relatively new material. How this material is used or if it is not used at all is entirely up to each person and institution. And at that point this monograph can be of help, as it provides tools such as a definition of video essays and a method for their analysis and assessment. An active use of the video essay tool is encouraged, inviting students and professionals alike to make video essays instead of limiting themselves to consume them. For this end, it is hoped that this monograph provides enough motivation.

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