

David Vichnar, PhD
OPPONENT'S REPORT: re "*Brophy, Deligny, and Guattari:
The Avant-garde as Subsumption and Stratification*"
by Valeriya Sabitova (MA dissertation, 2021)

Ms Sabitova's MA project undertakes no lesser task than to present, on the basis of her critique of Peter Bürger's conception of the (neo-)avantgarde, her own original theorisation of the avantgarde cultural phenomenon based on the two terms included in her title: "subsumption" (instead of "subversion") and "stratification" (instead of "resistance"). This she attempts on the basis of an original synthesis of three independent yet intertwined discourses: Deleuzo-Guattarian (anti-)philosophy, Fernand Deligny's (anti-)psychiatry, and Brigid Brophy's textual poetics, a triad is present in the thesis through the three interlinked concepts of transversality, deterritorialisation, and "linguistic leprosy".

The need for this reconceptualisation springs from what Ms Sabitova rightly identifies as a series of "foreclosures" in the type of binarist theorising of the avantgarde that would simply reduce it to a symptom of a particular conception of temporality (the "now"), originality (vs. repetition), and autonomy (the "anti-" vanguardist position) vis-à-vis its subsequent institutionalisation. Rather than renegotiating the well-worn binarisms of the historical avant-garde vs. the neo-avant-garde, revolution vs. institutionalization, Ms Sabitova's thesis departs from a position her supervisor has termed "a broad conception of possibility [...] of emergent relations – paradigm shifts, perturbations and discontinuities within a seeming continuous process" (8) in order to transcend "the avant-garde trope" of "the syntax of negation" (31). Ms Sabitova's detailed forays into philosophical transversality, psychiatric deterritorialisation, and radical poetics manages to produce a fuller and more complex account of the avant-garde as "a transversal phenomenon whose history is not simply a temporal linearity but a cross-temporal outcome of subsumption and stratification processes" (35). Of particular interest is Ms Sabitova's distinction between institution and institutionalisation (something she rightly criticises Bürger for ignoring), which allows her to propose that "the avant-garde as an institution can be a viable mechanism of critique" (57).

Laudable is Ms Sabitova's consistency with which she painstakingly defines her terms and the grace with which she employs these sources to inform her own argument, without her voice ever becoming subservient to theirs or relying on them to make her point for her. There might, at times, be a little too many quotations (some a little too long *not* to appear as block-quotes) running through her argument, but Ms Sabitova's command of the critical discourse she employs is competent, her close readings of the primary text are insightful and well-argued, she is apt at synthesising concepts and drawing original conclusions. Of particular interest in the parts of the thesis devoted to Brigid Brophy's *In Transit* is Ms Sabitova's analysis (on pp. 42-4) of the issue of the past narrative tense in which *In Transit* is related.

As for critical remarks, there are a number of formatting oddities (indents after block quotes, misaligned paragraphs, essay/chapter titles in italics) and typos/minor language problems, which the opponent has taken the liberty of keeping track of and will happily provide Ms Sabitova with. It would also have been wiser (and more in tune with standard procedure) to place chapter beginnings on new pages and to restart footnote numbering for each chapter (rather than ending up with 289 of them). Still, by departmental standards, these formal and language shortcomings remain comparatively minor and on the formatting side of things that can easily be fixed—overall Ms Sabitova's style and language remain up to task.

All that said, my questions / concerns are really minimal here:

1. I was struck by the description of Freudian transference as "working only with the temporally linear spaces of the past and its traumas" (34), esp. given that one of the key Freudian concepts for understanding traumatic meaning (revised by Lacan) is "afterwardness" (*Nachträglichkeit*), where trauma becomes "deferred action" whose "meaning" arrives only "afterwards" and is thus suspended in a double / phantasmatic temporality akin to that of the avant-garde's "newness." Thus, not a "linear space" but one of past future of what will have happened.
2. The reason I bring this up is that this can be linked to Lyotard's notion of the postmodern sublime, "putting forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself", whereby "the work of art" itself is formulating the rules of "what will have been done" (*Postmodern Condition*, 81). While the thesis wisely eschews going down the postmodern rabbit hole, dealing with postmodernism solely in the context of Brophy's (problematic) PM credentials, it does work with the avant-garde in the context of psychopathology and its present/futurist orientation, and I simply wonder if Freud & Lyotard could not help Ms Sabitova further cement her argument (rather than falling by the wayside)?
3. This in turn brings me to Brigid Brophy, characterised with the help of Carole Sweeney as "a forerunner of British postmodernism" (24), whose own problematic temporal status speaks to Lyotard's famous definition of PM as "modernism in its nascent state"—perhaps one way of addressing Brophy's "out-of-place" status in the usual plottings of literary history?
4. While it is indeed refreshing to re-read *In Transit* and its multiple disintegrations in the context of Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy and Deligny's psychiatry, the placement of Brophy within the context of the thesis remains somewhat *ad hoc*. While the points of contact and dissent between Guattari and Deligny are well-documented, it remains unclear what Brophy's status here is: Does her *In Transit* "illustrate"/ "depart from" / "engage with" (any or all of the above) transversality and deterritorialisation as theorised by them? (To my knowledge, Brophy's exposure to French theory was minimal.) Would Hélène Cixous' and/or Pierre Guyotat's early 1970's texts—cases of demonstrable "influence" of D&G— "do" as well for Ms Sabitova's argument? Or, if the anglophone context was sought for here for pragmatic reasons, what about Christine

Brooke-Rose? Is *In Transit's* status here somehow exemplary, or does it stand as a singularity?

Having raised these issues (which rather than criticism constitute an attempt of thinking through and with the thesis), I am still positive that Ms Sabitova's M.A. project presents a well-researched work of original theorising and compelling novel argumentation. As such, it exceeds the usual scope and depth of a regular M.A. thesis at the Department.

Therefore, I have no qualms in recommending it for the defence and propose a grade of ***excellent – výborně***. I would also like to nominate it for the Mathesius Prize. ***Práci doporučuji k obhajobě.***



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