

To my parents

REFRACTION AND ESSAY FILM: THE CASE OF ALEXANDER  
SOKUROV

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

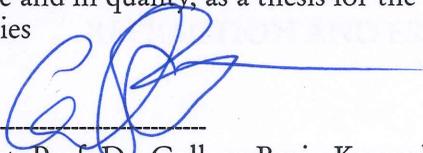
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

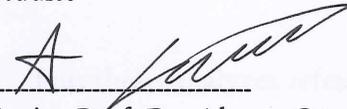
THE DEPARTMENT OF  
COMMUNICATION AND DESIGN  
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JANUARY 2017

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies

  
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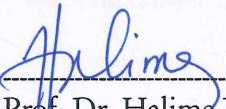
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## ABSTRACT

### REFRACTION AND ESSAY FILM: THE CASE OF ALEXANDER SOKUROV

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January, 2017

This thesis analyzes refraction in essay film. As a self-reflexive method, refraction deals with the self-critique of visual representation in essay film. In this thesis, I develop two different dimensions of post-aesthetics of essay film in the line of semio-ideological understanding. The first dimension, as a horizontal interstitial aesthetization of essay film, deals with cinematic parataxis and metalepsis, where I discuss Godardian constellation and Agnès Varda's metaleptic narrative through Adorno's negative dialectics and Benjaminian constellation. The second dimension of the post-aesthetics of essay film, as vertical interstice, deals with intermediality and refraction. As constituting to different layer of essayistic construction in the film, intermediality is discussed in Peter Greenaway and Harun Farocki, and refraction is discussed in the line of photographic and visual epistemology. The thesis finalizes with the discussion of Alexander Sokurov's late refractive cinema (*Russian Ark* (2002) and *Francofonia* (2015)), through the horizontal and vertical understanding of essay film's post-aesthetics.

Keywords: Alexander Sokurov, Cinematic Parataxis, Essay Film, Intermediality, Refraction.

## ÖZET

### KIRILMA VE DENEME FİLM: ALEKSANDR SOKUROV ÖRNEĞİ

Nasirov, Yasin

Yüksek Lisans, İletişim ve Tasarım Bölümü

Tez Danışmanı: Yar. Doç. Dr. Colleen Bevin Kennedy Karpas

Ocak 2017

Bu tez deneme film’de kırılma kavramını tartışıyor. Kırılma deneme filmin görsel simgeselliği konu aldığı bir alandır. Bu tez deneme filmde iki farklı post-estetik anlayışı üzerine incelemelerde bulunuyor. Bunlardan ilki deneme filmin yatay post-estetik anlayışıdır. Bu anlayış deneme filmin anlatı biçimindeki sinematik parataksis ve metalepsis eğilimlerini incelemektedir ki, bu anlatı biçimini ilk önce Adorno’nun negatif diyalektik anlayışıyla, daha sonra Jean-Luc Godard’da konstelasyon ve Agnes Varda’da metalepsis üzerinden inceliyorum. Deneme filmin ikinci post-estetik anlayışı ise intermedial ve kırılma kavramlarının oluşturduğu dikey katmandır. Konstelasyon ve metalepsis kavramlarının zamansal önceliğinden farklı olarak, intermedial ve kırılma deneme filmde görsel simgeselliğin mekansal boşluğu ve önceliği üzerine yoğunlaşıyor. Bu katmanda Peter Greenaway ve Harun Farocki’nin intermedial eğilimlerini ve Aleksandr Sokurov’un iki filminde (*Russian Ark* (2002) ve *Francofonia* (2015)) kırılma kavramını tartışıyorum.

Anahtar kelimeler: Aleksandr Sokurov, Deneme Film, İntermedial, Kırılma, Sinematik Parataksis.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I remember when I had my entrance interview for the department to study whatever I had in my mind. However, after all those years, my research has evolved and almost I cannot remember what was that I wanted to research in the first place. Perhaps, this evolution was the best thing that the department gave me and I believe that being part of this community was far better epiphany than the satisfaction of completing my thesis. Coming from other social science department, I had my fugacious chances to grab for cinema. This department gave me the chance, that I would call “home” and I am happy to meet every single dweller of this department.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Colleen Bevin Kennedy Karpat for her mentorship, encouragement, and motivation through my graduate years. Her valuable inputs were not only fruitful for writing a thesis, but also were valuable for how to pursue academic career and how to become a better writer for academia. This thesis emerges as a manifestation of her excellent guidance.

I would also like to thank Ahmet Gürata and Andreas Treske for their contributions and for their inspirations to my cinematic thinking. I thank to every share of ideas that happened in the classes and beyond them. Moreover, I thank to Ersan Ocak, for his course of essay film, that was the event that triggered the very foundations of this thesis.

Last but not least, I would like to thank to my fellow cohorts at the department, with whom all those years my thoughts were in trial and hopefully were shaped into something better and with whom I cherished the importance of sharing the knowledge of every kind. I want to thank Jafar Jafarov for his life-time friendship and motivation. I also want to thank Feride Nur Haskaraca, Berhan Akgür and Suphi Keskin for their camaraderie that embellished my Bilkent years.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In a 1974 interview for *Screen*, Peter Wollen argues that political aesthetics must distinguish between three possible levels of film practice, which are perceived as distinct purposes for different audiences. First one is agitational level, which is for a limited and specific audience with a specific conjecture. The second level is a propagandist, what is aimed at a mass audience with an immediate political line. The third level is that of theoretical film, which is aimed at a limited audience with theoretical conjuncture, rather than an immediately political one. Trying to locate essay film in these levels of film practices, it becomes very pertinent with the synthesis of these three levels: essay film is for a limited audience as first level, with an immediate political line as second level and it is surely a theoretical film as the third level.

Essay film emerges insofar that it fits to Adornean attempt of *Versöhnung* (reconciliation, a condition that nonidentical and difference can articulate itself) that fits the metacritical form of visual representation to that of philosophical contemplation in the content, as a reflexive metacritique. Employing the concept of metacritique, as refractive method for both cinematic medium and philosophical content, essay film becomes essayistic when a film or cinematic work of art attempts to achieve such a condition of *Versöhnung* where the form of representation stands true to its content and thereby authentically and effectively defining each other. Essay film tends to

see form and content as an inseparable. Every film essayist that has been accepted as such in film scholarship—Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard, Agnes Varda, Harun Farocki, Alan Resnais, Dziga Vertov, Michael Moore, Errol Morris, Jonas Mekas, Alexander Sokurov, etc—as long as their essayistic oeuvre concerned, committed to this *Versöhnung*, where it has been made clear that the critical proposition of the film itself is not only limited and solely defined with the critical content, but also and more profoundly it is defined within the literalization of the medium, as such. That is to say, essay film is not only reflexively metacritical in its content, but also reflexively metacritical in its visual form. Indeed, essay film does not bifurcate these two as distinct methodologies, but rather as one meta-methodology. On these notes, an idiosyncratic feature of essay film—I believe the profound margin that delineates this genre from others or at least should be treated as such—is that the metacritical puissance of the essay film’s content is not unveiled as such through the content-analysis itself, but rather it comes from its form analysis, in which all the things that have been under investigation is reflected metacritically through its form; this genre is the experimentation of the subject-matter through the experimentation of the cinematic medium, rather than an experimentation of it through cinematic medium itself. Hence, the experimented part in essay film foregrounds the form of its representation more than itself. This is the main reason and a point of departure, that I want to achieve in this thesis, as I assess the subject-matter through not solely political perspective, but through semio-ideological perspective.

Although essay film is a relatively new trend in film studies, some scholars, such as Timothy Corrigan, Laura Rascaroli, Catherine Lupton, and Sarah Cooper, have made a substantial contribution on this trend focusing on the personal and subjective predilection of the genre. According those works, essay film has been regarded more or less as anti-aesthetic form of filmmaking, especially Rascaroli’s *A Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and The Essay Film* (2009). In contrast, this thesis’s main

purpose is to take the essay film genre's aesthetic dimensions and assess through postmodern sensibilities. For this reason, I try to discuss essay film using semiotics, through which I believe the essay film's language can be evaluated. Even if essay film collapses a classical sense of filmic language, this deconstruction in the form divulges itself as another filmic signification and emerges as a way that defines a new spectatorship. The reason for such a semio-ideological perspective in the thesis is that subjectivity (subjective voice-over/personal/autobiographic) cannot be established as a strong defining feature for essay film genre. The subjective voice of essay film is important, but more important than the subjectivity itself is how it is articulated and this articulation, I believe, should be evaluated through film language. Consequently, if essay film is formless, un-systematic, then this, by no means, does not attribute to its aesthetic absence. It is rather a post avant-garde aesthetic concept that essay film employs, than a total anti-aesthetization. It is rather a form that is against other totalitarian forms, rather than a formless that cannot be defined. To paraphrase Barthes, even if chronological linearity or causality are to be rejected, even if fragments with no center are to structure the text — whether presented as images or through verbal or written language — there is still a story of the self, the construction of a subject, regardless of how much it is deconstructed and shifted without an anchor. This thesis sheds light upon that construction of deconstructed subject and the self.

Chapter II gives a diachronic account of the evolution of the historical context of essay film. I demarcate three possible phases of the evolution of essay film. The first phase has been the silent era, influenced by the formalist school. From Vertov to Astruc, this phase focuses on the visual puissance of essayistic material. The second phase which started in the post-war period with Chris Marker's *Letters from Siberia* (1958) and with Bazin's assessment of film, a period where essay film form had to acknowledge the importance of voice-over narration. This phase still holds the

strongest influence over essay film nowadays. The third phase is the phase where essay film leaves the small screen and becomes so-called paracinema (eclectic mode of filmmaking, which also has been used in the context of experimental filmmaking) or mega-cinema (total work of art, which tends to bring together all forms of art beyond small screen, such as theatre and opera).

As post-aesthetic form, essay film offers us criticize the valid aesthetic forms through a different aesthetic understanding. Hence, I attempt to delineate this interstitial aesthetics of essay film. The interstitial aesthetics comes after all aesthetic forms are practiced and evaluated. More importantly, the interstitial aesthetics is the aesthetic form where all other aesthetic forms are remediated. I propose two distinct dimensions of this interstitial aesthetics of essay film. The first dimension is horizontal interstitial aesthetics of essay film. Chapter III elucidates this horizontal interstice, using the concept of cinematic parataxis. I put forward two aspects of cinematic parataxis in this chapter: constellation, as defined through Benjamin's philosophy and exemplified with Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*; and metalepsis, as the other aspect of cinematic parataxis, is exemplified with Agnès Varda. This chapter puts forward the artistic intuition of the essayist. This dimension, basically, tries to interrelate different horizons of cultural reality. The second dimension is vertical interstitial aesthetics. Different from horizontal interstitial understanding of essayistic aesthetics, this dimension assesses possible reading on "within-the-shot."

Chapter IV assesses the critical aspect of the essayist in that the vertical interstice, as I propose, becomes the metacritical voice of the essayist. This chapter puts forward three layers of such a vertical interstice: *sonic interstice* as in Farocki, *intermediality* as in Greenaway and *refraction* as in Godard's photo-essay *Letter to Jane* (1972). The refraction in essay film is its distinguishing feature. According to Timo-

thy Corrigan, refractive essay film concentrates on the representational regime of the essayistic itself and channelling it towards artwork and filmic perceptions, rather than human subjectivity or public life. Moreover, Christa Blümlinger describes refractive essay films as autobiographic inventories of film phenomenology. For example, Jean-Luc Godard's *Scenario of Film Passion* (1982) and *Letter to Freddy Bauche* (1982) are refractive essay films directed to cinema itself. This thesis takes the concept of "refraction" in Corrigan's broader definition, which is not only directed to cinema, but also towards the "unmaking" of visual representational regime.

Finally, Chapter V is about the importance and the place of the refractive feature in the essay film, which I discuss with Sokurov's late museum films. Firstly, this chapter discusses Sokurov's oeuvre as an interstice between modernist and postmodernist thinking. Then, the chapter goes on to discuss two films—*Russian Ark* (2002) and *Francofonia* (2014)—in the line of the refraction and unmaking of the museum heritage as a repository for cultural and historical hybridity.

## **Methodology**

Cinematically, the status of non-fiction does not validate a film's status as an essay, nor does the status of essay validate its status as non-fiction. Additionally, the thesis does not attempt to question the presupposition of the essay form's non-fictionality, but rather, by accepting it as such, hopefully to enrich its oeuvre through and as other form of mode of representation. There exists a substantial filmography that has been labeled as essay films, by both academia and the filmmakers themselves and there are those films (both fictional and documentary) that have been kept outside of this form. It is true especially for the fictional films, when we think that essay films are heavily non-fictional. This thesis does not deal with ontological ques-

tion of what is fiction and what is reality in regard to essay form, but rather I will take these two modes of filmmaking with an equal weight and I will discuss more important question of the form itself: how audio-visual material in essay film is constructed, why this peculiar construction (or de-constructed construction) is important and what this form says about its ideological framework. The methodology that is pursued in this thesis is close reading of films that have been in the focus of essay film scholarship with the line of Frankfurt School and contemporary continental philosophy. Overall, this thesis tries to discuss the possible aesthetic signification of essay film's anti-aesthetization.

## CHAPTER II

### ON ESSAY (FILM) FORM

The essay form, whether written or filmed, is a method of critical thinking. Although every piece of art (novel, painting, film, etc.) can engage the audience in critical thinking, the essay calls the audience to the nakedness of the issue at hand. In essay film, this explicitness calls for a priority on the thinking process over the proposition of cinematic narrative. Thus, essay film captures both the representational power of images and concepts as thesis and verbal negotiation and negation of subject(author)/object(image) as anti-thesis. One can exemplify this explicitness as a personal (political) letter to somebody, or as a personal rumination on post-war images or as a recollection of memories. Yet, ultimately, this critical thinking demands personal enunciation in the public sphere in a “searching” manner. In the core of every essay (film), even the author cannot claim the supposedly fullest composition of the particular consciousness of any concept/narrative.

Since the 1970s, essay form has become a major genre both in literature and cinema, advanced in large part in order to question the so-called “grand narrative” of history itself.<sup>1</sup> However, the attributes and frameworks of this genre have been the-

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<sup>1</sup> One of the building blocks of the essay film is to fragment modernist “universalizing narrativity” into “petite narratives,” which ultimately shines through the glasses of postmodernist skepticism. Grand narratives and its antithesis as meta-narrative will be discussed in Chapter III. See, Lyotard, Jean-François. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

orized as a lack of clarity in its definition, both in literature and film. Unlike other genres (there is also a debate on whether it is a genre or not), the essay has never been presented as clear-cut; it is still ambiguous what formulas and attributes “essay” must or should entail. This unclarity is not definitely a pejorative, since this form does not require such a unity in the first place. Furthermore, this unclarity carries its own risks in casting the form loosely. Another important point should be made for the thesis is that although essay film form, theoretically and visually, does not eliminate “fiction/performance” as one of its constituents, it is explored and expanded through nonfictional practices. Although written essay and filmed essay (cinematic essay) do not overlap completely in the way they handle the content, since they are different mode of representation, there are some recognized guidelines that define both of them. Before examining the differences between them, which will later open up a discussion for the possible expansion of cinematic essay theory in the thesis, it is helpful to shed the light on the similarities of trans-medial essayistic form.

## 2.1 Defining Essay Form

This part will consider the following attributes as central to the essay form:

### *a) subjectivity*

Subjectivity can be misleading, if the difference between subjective unity and dialectic subjectivity goes unacknowledged. While the former is not the issue for the essay form, the latter defines essay form’s subjectivity. Subjective unity (or subjective monologue), when evaluated in the “atomistic” fashion, can be seen as a practice where “subjectivity,” in most occasions, is articulated, but not decoded. David Montero (2012) uses the phrase “factual reportage” to elucidate a form of subjectiv-

ity that is non-essayistic. On the other hand, the subjectivity that essay form (both written and filmed) deals with is the phase that non-essayistic subjectivity is missing: the judgmental nature of subject's own voice. This decoding of its own interpretation emerges as an amalgamation of different voices within itself, and from others. Essayistic subjectivity (or dialectic subjectivity) is more a process than the information itself; a process that author's subjective view is judged by other views and this process is attempted by himself and himself only. In other words, essay form's subjectivity does not let its own domain to be subjugated by other positivistic principles. Hence, it is autonomous, even from its own voice.

To exemplify the problematization of subjectivity in a written essay, Adorno criticizes Stefan Zweig's essayistic approach in his book on Balzac : "Such writing does not criticize basic abstract concepts, mindless dates, worn-out cliches, but implicitly and thereby with the greater complicity, it presupposes them." (1984: 154) Here, Adorno puts forward the difference between subjectivity and essayistic subjectivity and eases the problem of misunderstanding the concept of subjectivity. In other words, not every subjective thought can be regarded as an essay.

By the same token, Montero's "*reportage*" distinguishes essay film, as nonfictional practice, from other nonfictional practices such as traditional documentary<sup>2</sup> and observational cinema (2012: 21). Although other forms of nonfictional practices,

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<sup>2</sup> Here, traditional documentaries are referred to Direct Cinema practices in American Cinema. Although Direct Cinema is related to French *cinéma vérité* (direct translation from Vertov's *Kino-Pravda*), on the issues of immediacy and "the real," there are some theoretical and institutional frameworks where they do not overlap. Firstly, they differ in regard to institutional framework, and thus, to film-makers' intervention. Until 1960, documentary filmmaking displays most of the signs of institutional status. With the advent of New Wave Cinemas, the film-maker becomes more involved in the filmmaking process, which paved the way for more iconoclastic practices and less institutional. This change in 1960s, heralded the "essay film" as a new third genre, even it was accepted under the documentary. It would be more "fit" to the thesis, if I would take this form into account as "non-fictional," but not as "documentary, in order to differentiate the histories of their different practices. See, Macdonald, Kevin. (1991). *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of the Documentary*. London: Faber & Faber. and Nichols, Bill. (1991) *Representing Reality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

such as documentaries, come with their “own thesis,” the difference between essay film and other documentaries is in how their subjectivity is formulated. In a nutshell, essayistic subjectivity is beyond “I” — the “I” which holds a powerful position in traditional documentary. While observational or direct “reportage” in documentary “invites us to take as true what subjects recounts about something that happened,” (Nichols, 1991: 21) essay film tries to debunk and interpellate such a visual reclaim with the audience and with the “I”. The intentions of subjectivity/reportage in essay film and other documentaries differ in that the non-essayistic intention of reportage aims to convince the audience that the implications drawn from the visual facts are, pre-supposedly, correct or at least constructed as correct.<sup>3</sup> Unlike documentaries’ persuasiveness, essay film avoids drawing a definitive thesis about its subject.

*b) heretic*

This formal attribute of essayism is non-generic. In other words, because of its heretic structure, essay film is not considered as a genre; it tries to go beyond formal, conceptual and social frameworks and limitations of other genres. In Adornean sense of essay form, heresy is its formal law, and violates the orthodoxy of thought and transgresses dominant narratives (Alter, 1996: 171). Hence, it is an open form, non-conclusive and ultimately, indefinable. By the same token, Gyorgy Lukács defines it as “a form that manufactures its own existence” (1974: 11).

The heresy of essay form comes with both content and the form. Its content deals with history, politics and society in such a way that the theories of knowledge that have evolved into a scientific consciousness come under attack from the essay form.

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<sup>3</sup> For comparison, see Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) and Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004).

Strong essays open up such a dimension. Taking *Das Capital* as an example, this huge essay is a critique of the economic and political structure of the system, breaking the presuppositions of scientific consciousness. In parallel, Jean-Luc Godard and Gorin's photo essay *Letter to Jane* (1972) tries to question the purity and cleanliness of the image of Jane Fonda and attempts to problematize the transition from "vision as physical operation" to "visuality as social fact".<sup>4</sup> This characteristic of essay form is not defined by "order of things" (narrative), but rather by "order of concepts". This heretic form is chosen by the author itself, so that the essay's telling and showing are composed to reflect the author's thinking rather than generic demands. The structure of the written essay and the montage of images are constructed by the flow of this critical thinking. This transgressive characteristic is shared between written and filmed essay.

### *c) dialogic/dialectic*

The contrast between ideological utterances, that is the composition of different discourses with different perspectives into one personal body as they are articulated in search of one's own voice, is an integral part of essay form. It is helpful to expand the word "judgement" in this form, as Montaigne calls it. "Judgement," here, is not a process or proposition that creates a new order in an extraverted manner, but rather it is an author's introverted engagement. This introspection brings together different discourses of existence. If this "judgement" were directed outward, it would fall into didacticism and into assimilation of positivist paradigm. Therefore, a "judgement" expressed in essay form is dialogic. This heteroglossia "represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradiction between the present and past, between different epochs of history, between different groups, between differ-

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<sup>4</sup> For further details, see *Letter to Jane: An Investigation About A Still* (Godard and Gorin, 1972) and Alter, Nora. (1996). The Political Im/Perceptible in the Essay film, *New German Critique*, 68, 165-192

ent tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given a bodily form” (Bakhtin, 1981: 291). What differentiates essay from other forms is this Bakhtinian body. One can see such a contrasting composition in Marker’s *Sans Soleil* (1983). The presence of differentiation/contrast of a body leads to the traumatic clash of the parties of this composition. This clash is what makes the body “dialogic.” Marker’s character is in such a clash when his voice and body jumps between Japan, Africa, and America. The voice of Marker’s character and his presence (images) creates what Bakhtin call *double-voicedness*. This duplicity is not simply a dialogue.

*d) self-reflective/self-reflexive*

The property of self-criticism begins as an interaction between opposite views that the essay incorporates to challenge its own authority. This property is one of the main attributes of critical thought: the self-reflexive awakening of an intellect to the study of itself. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective. As essay (film) examines any concept, it takes this concept as its own body, and this body is a problem to be solved or discussed. Thus, the essay’s (film) functioning is introspective, framing itself as lacking certainty. As Bakhtin uses the concept of dialogism, as an experience of close encounter with itself through the others, Adorno (1991) states that essay utilizes dialogic understanding as his key trait to affirm the intellectual experience as a trial, through which the essayist puts his contemplation into a challenge with the others (13).

*e) skeptic and relativist*

Skepticism affirms the potentiality of “doubt.” It would be significant to stress that this “doubtfulness” is neither a negative nor does it devitalize the power of essayism. However, rather distinctively, this element winnows the essay form from oth-

ers. Michel de Montaigne is considered as one of the most important figures in the late French Renaissance, both for his literary innovations as well as for his contributions to philosophy. He is credited for developing a new form of literary expression, the essay, an admittedly incomplete treatment of a topic pertinent to human life; such a treatment coalesces philosophy with historical/autobiographical nuances, presented from the author's own personal perspective. As a philosopher, he is best known for his skepticism. Like the *Essays* (1570-1592), the essay form is unsystematic.<sup>5</sup> However, such an unsystematic organization is not constructed for the sake of the disorder, but rather is controlled by two philosophical approaches: *skepticism* and *relativism*, which are also associated with Montaigne's essay form. On the one hand, Montaigne, as a skeptical philosopher, maintains freedom of judgment by avoiding a particular devotion to any theoretical disposition in order to reach equipollence. While he avoids reaching a judgment concerning certain issues, certainly, he articulates opinions in order to subvert customary ways of thinking and acting.<sup>6</sup> Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's culture (standard) is superior to others and thus it is the standard the others should be judged by. Needless to say, Montaigne's concern with cultural heterogeneity, combined with his rejection of ethnocentrism, has paved the way for Montaigne's style as relativist, that there is no objective truth. Although the complete fidelity to cultural relativism in Montaigne is a matter of dispute between critics<sup>7</sup>, his critique of ethnocentric thought and reasoning was a harbinger for later developments in cultural studies. For this

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<sup>5</sup> Montaigne's *Essays* collects 107 chapters/essays on a wide range of seemingly unconnected topics, including - knowledge, education, love, death, politics, and the colonization of the New World. Moreover, chapter titles are often only loosely related to their contents. The lack of such logical headway from one chapter to the next creates a sense of intentional hodgepodge that is compounded by Montaigne's style. See, Hartle, Ann. (2003). *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>6</sup> See, Montaigne, Michel de. (2003). *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, trans. Roger Ariew and Marjorie Glicksman Grene, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. This essay is probably the most skeptical writing of Montaigne.

<sup>7</sup> See Lévi-Strauss, Claude. (1995). Rereading Montaigne, *The Story of Lynx*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi, University of Chicago Press.

reason, I will be extending the discussion of essay form to the works of Benjamin, Lukacs, and Adorno in the following section.

*f) non-conclusive/non-didactic*

To assay is to start a thinking process that unfolds the potential answers to a specific question. Thus, the answer to a specific question is lacking in certainty or validity. Otherwise, the process initiated would be final and closed, leaving no room for criticism or negation. Therefore, the logic of essayistic thinking, in a film or a piece of writing, aims to initiate an open-ended journey of reflection between the author and the beholder. The difference of essay film form from other genre films is the redefinition of the spectator and the author as one dialogic entity, where the author himself/herself becomes a spectator. This entity is the discursive positioning of the essayist. The interchange that emerges from such a negotiation between the reader and the author, has an utmost importance to question one's own beliefs, as Montaigne (1952) underlines in "Of The Art of Conference": "When any one contradicts me, he raises my intention, not my anger: I advance towards him who controverts me, who instructs me; the cause of truth ought to be common cause both of the one and the other" (447). Taking account the relativist and dialogic dimension of the essay form, it seems that this form is necessarily inconclusive; it is not predetermined, neither by the self (the author) nor the object (the text). In *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay*, Graham Good explains the process of the essay as "a reflection of and on the changing self in the changing world, not the pure abstract, not a Cartesian construction of the self or Newtonian construction of the world, but a construction of, and a response to, this time and place in the world, by this self" (1988: 23). Thus, the phenomenology of essay form is inconclusive and always open to further debate. In this respect, we can say that the essay's judgement on the subject-matter is not fixed into an eternal temporality, but rather is a paint

of the constantly changing one in the existing temporality. This lack of fixation or resolution, Montaigne underlines, is inherent to essay form and obstructs the form to reach its didactic purpose.

Regardless of the shared theoretical domain of written and filmed essays, these different mediums employ different approaches in practice. The following sections will illuminate the trans-mediality of the essay form, with respect to their historical context, because above all, *praxis* (practical knowledge) overwhelms *theoria* (abstract, academic, and universal knowledge).

## 2.2 The Historical Context of Essay Form

To write an essay is an existentialist act, since it problematizes the relationship between “what we know/learn/hear” and “what we experience.” Cinematically speaking then, essay film problematizes the relationship between “what an image represents” and “what it conceals/lacks.” For this reason, the form has been a valuable practice since World War II. Since 1970s, the intellectual sphere has been under constant attack. The position and function of the intelligentsia, especially in Europe, became a focus of international debate. This debate was important for the critical rethinking of the structure of the system. Essay tradition was probably the most influential path to take, since this path would not establish itself as a structure of the predetermined concepts. One of the main goals of this tradition was to free outside world from abstraction and unveil the cultural and historical differences. This part of evaluation of written essay form and its practices will be limited to the writings of Lukács, Max Bense and Adorno.

Unlike the two major filmmaking modes of fiction and documentary, essay form has not been praised enough. It is a traumatic exploration of predetermined cultural

products and universal concept of historical artifacts. The adjective *traumatic* has two implications. First of all, it infers to the nature of “essay form” itself and “the process” the form casts upon itself. Yet, this trauma is not problematic in that the exploration emerges from skepticism toward the already “formed.” This need of essay form is the compulsive/necessary urge of unconcealment. Secondly, it suggests the disguised nature of the “already formed,” which the essay form sheds lights on. In this respect, Timothy Corrigan states that “essay form does not create new forms of experimentation, realism or narrative; they rethink existing ones as a dialogue of ideas” (2011: 51). Yet, a more descriptive definition of “essay form” comes from Lukács in *Soul and Form*:

The essay is always concerned with something already formed or at best, with something that has been; it is a part of its essence that it does not draw something new out of an empty vacuum, but only gives a new order to such things as once lived. And because he only newly orders them, not forming something new out of the formless, he is bound to them; he must always speak the “truth” about them, find, that is, the expression of their essence.” (1974: 10)

In “On The Nature and Form of the Essay,” Lukacs ponders the question of the viable definition of the form and how such a definition would distinguish it from other literary genres. My purpose to go beyond Montaigne in the discussion of the essay form and also essay film is that the distinguishing element formulated by Lukacs, Bense and Adorno on this issue transforms it to another shape, by linking it with not only artistic criticism, but also as a form of historico-political critique. Whereas Lukacs primarily engaged in the theory of the essay, as an art form, Adorno, on the other hand, elevated the form beyond “aesthetic appreciation.”

As a passage between purely “positivist knowledge” and purely “aesthetic pleasure,” Lukacs’ essay takes the question on the identity of the form, rather than discussing whether criticism is an art or science. Lukacs’ attempt to identify the form and the soul of the essay leads to his discussion of “totality and unity,” yet this unity is “importantly not Hegelian” (Huhn, 1999: 184). Positioned between Kant and Adorno (who breaks from Kant), Lukacs’ search for an aesthetic particularity for the essay form, which will definitely differ it from other forms of art, shares common ground with Kantian aesthetic judgment; which, simply put, states that aesthetic judgment is both subjective and universal. Before Bense’s and Adorno’s reflections on the form, it would be helpful to elaborate on this common ground and to see how Lukacs linked it to the theory of essay form. Though they had slightly different understanding of the functionality of the form, it can be said that they shared the same thoughts on it.

In his “On The Nature and The Form of The Essay," Lukacs attempts to differentiate art and science in that, “it is the content that affects us in science but in art it is the forms” (1910: 34). Then, he puts essay between art and science, sometimes closer to science, since they both try to reach the truth, and sometimes closer to art, since the form of the essayistic approach makes it an essay (1910: 40-41). Eventually, the substantial contribution Lukacs makes is that the essay should be outside the realm of scientific discourse and literature, since the emphasis of the essay is the process itself, but not the judgment; the process of judging without reaching any closure (1910: 51). He went on the form of this judging process, by distinguishing between determinant judgment and reflective judgment. Deriving from Kant’s definition, Lukacs attributes essay’s judgment to reflective judgment; reflective judgment works in a direct opposition to the determinant judgment, in which reflective judgment is an active, positing judgment which is not determined by cognition (Huhn, 1999: 188). For Lukacs, this reflective judgment, which also submitted into

a second circle of reflective judgment, emphasizes the ambivalence of the subject matter. The true purpose of the essayist is how to mete and dispose of the abundance of such a reflection. Thus, Lukacs believed that the form of the essay is the provisional stage of the experience and the nature of this experience is its tentativeness and conjecture.

However, what probably raised a concern and investigation in Lukacs interpretation for Adorno and Max Bense is that Lukacs assigned the essay's form to aesthetic evaluation. Max Bense, a German philosopher of science and aesthetics, reformulated Lukacs' thought on the form as the area between "creation" and "persuasion"; as there is a border between poetry and prose in relation to "creation" (poetry) and "persuasion" (prose), the essay occupies this area between the aesthetic stage of *creation* and the ethical stage of *persuasion* (Burgard, 1989: 17). By using the German translation of the word "essay" (*Versuch*), Bense contributes the substantial and generic status to the essay, as its status of "experiment". Since its nature is experimental, the essay's judgmental process of the domain must be and stay in "relative" stage. Unlike Lukacs, who believed that the essay has its destiny to reach the aesthetic unity and will be vanquished by grand aesthetic scheme (*die grose asthetik*), Bense attributed much more power to the form, because the essay is an active category of human mind per se (Bense, 1947).

On the other hand, Theodor Adorno, who was closer to Bense than to Lukacs, criticized Lukacs' stand on aesthetic feature of the essay form. As Adorno theorized, the essay form's foremost trait was that it actually emerged as a reaction/rejection to "*objective subreption*"; when a person judges something as beautiful, according to Kant's aesthetic judgment. The essay's purpose is to interchange with such a deliberate misrepresentation (*subreption*). Adorno's postulation on the theory of the essay form was to argue the form's disjointed temporality, in opposition

to Lukacs' redemptive attempt to define the form through mystical solution: "It [the essay] has to be constructed as though it could always break off at any point...Discontinuity is essential to the essay; its subject matter is always a conflict brought to a standstill" (Adorno, 1991: 16). Although Adorno concurs with Lukacs on the aesthetic values of the form, since it is the subjective experience of the mind, he rejected Lukacs' "essay as an art form" treatment, by remarking on the form's "claim to truth." (Adorno, 1984: 153) I want to underline two specific aspects of essay form in order to assess its malleable definition: dialogic aspect and self-reflexive aspect. No piece of writing, film, or other visual work is without inner dialogue, of course, but to make this aspect its primary intention of the communication is essay strive and it is done explicitly. Lukacs remarked on this aspect in his "Soul and Form" (1910) as a letter to Leo Popper. However, the dialogue in the essay does not only happen between the writer and reader or between the piece of work and the audience, but also, importantly the dialogue happens within the essayist himself as he puts the words on the paper; he can reject his line of reasoning anytime, because the narration or contemplation does not happen according to systematic guidelines, but according to thinking. Even a monologue (Bense thought that essay form has nothing to do with dialogue, but a reflecting monologue) can be constructed in such a manner that would open space for dialogue. In this sense, the dialogism of the essay form means "dialogue-by-monologue." However, as Adorno and Bense pointed out, this dialogue, or communicative intention, must be explicit and immediate, by opposing abstraction and estrangement of the topic.

The second aspect, self-reflexivity, can be understood and implemented in two ways. First way to implement it to see it as "authorial self-reflexivity," which basically means to approach to a subject matter autobiographically. Authorial self-reflexivity and the immediacy of the communication best coalesce in what Linda Hutcheon calls "overt self-reflexivity" (1980). As Hutcheon states, this type of self-

reflexivity often takes the shape of an explicit thematization, such as narratorial commentary of the writer (1980: 23). In essay form, the whole work is a narratorial commentary of the essayist.

The second way to implement self-reflexivity is to see it as “textual self-reflexivity”. Talking through literary discourse, it basically means a text performs, as a whole or in part, what it talks about. In other words, as Adorno states, “what is written about art may claim nothing of art’s mode of presentation, nothing that is of its autonomy of form” (1984: 153). Positivist maxim is tended to such a rigid separation of the form and the content. As “textual self-reflexivity” will more apposite to theorize on the form of essay film, with regard to visual mode of representation, alongside the “authorial self-reflexivity,” “textual self-reflexivity” is a substantial prerequisite for essay film form, thereby calling attention to itself as a cinematic construct as they interrogate their own domain, that is the “visual mode of representation”. It will be more emphatic detail on the essay film form, as I will argue that “authorial self-reflexivity” is insufficient to categorize the film as an essay film, where “textual self-referentiality” will elucidate properties for culling the essay films. Textual self-referentiality of essay film’s audio-visual material resides beyond authorial intention, or rather the author leaves the construction of audio-visual material open that the text of the film can speak for itself free from authorial intention. The function of the author in essay film thus becomes a function of removing the author from the equation. Thus, the author functions as a mediator between the spectator and the subject matter so that the spectator can make connections for himself or herself. Then, the essay film becomes not a presentation or representation, but a field of experimentation.

### 2.3 From Word To Image: Essayistic Approach To Film

Essay film, as a genre and radical form of visual representation, does not need to follow and realize the complete potential intentions of literal essay form. That is not to say that literary form is more capable than cinematic form, but rather that those two different mediums should be seen as separate applications of essay genre, rather than assuming cinematic essay as a derivative of literal form of essay. However, this thesis will mostly preserve the line of succession between the media. Although essay film practice began at the beginning of the century (or at least as film studies has been retracing it), the flourishing of the genre dates back to 1970s, when self-reflexive narrative structures became more common in literary studies and Jean-Francois Lyotard put forward the end of meta-narratives, emphasizing instead the importance of fragmentation and pluralism in social sciences. He underlines two crucial narratives that have captivated the past, precisely the modern world: (1) *history* as progressing towards social enlightenment and emancipation, and (2) *knowledge* as progressing towards totalization (Lyotard, 1979). He defines modernity as the age of meta-narrative legitimation, and postmodernity as the age in which meta-narratives have become decadent. Through his theory of the end of such narratives, Lyotard develops his own version of the postmodern condition as an age of hybridization. In the cinematic realm, Lyotard's phenomenon fomented the subjective nonfictional forms. As Michael Renov notes on this change, the desire for objectivity and social persuasiveness of the authority, as a compelling social narrative, was dwindling and it had important consequences for documentary filmmaking (Renov, 2004). Alongside external factors that triggered a new genre in cinematic medium, including socio-political change and cultural turn, the background that ushered in the essay film can also be attributed to factors internal to cinema as an

institution; traditional documentary could no longer keep up with the changes that it supposed to represent.

Film studies retraces the vestiges of essay film to 1920s. As the essay film emerged from the documentary and avant-garde traditions in cinema, the first reference to the term “essay” has been encountered in Eisenstein’s notes on his own work, dedicated to his project of making a film of *The Capital*, in 1927, which was a new kind of cinematographic work — “*collection of essays*”. Another similar example, yet unaccomplished, was Jacques Feyder’s idea of a film based on Montaigne’s essays.

The first piece of writing devoted to the essay film is probably Hans Richter’s “Der Filmessay, Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms,” published on 24 April 1940 in *Nationalzeitung*. He was considered as the author of essay films, and in his aforementioned article, he tries to announce them as a new kind of cinema, which would “give a body to invisible thoughts and ideas” (Richter, 1940). Richter underlines that the essay film explores excessive means to representation than the pure documentary, thereby harnessing its material from every kind of space and time; this would free the essay film from the constraints of “recording the external phenomena of simple sequence” of the documentary. Richter’s insight was that filmmaking did not necessarily reside outside the realm of filmmaker’s subjective thought or emotional state. That is to say, the film and the filmmaker should not be separated in purpose, as in fictional filmmaking, nor should the filmmaker try to stay indifferent to what s/he records as in traditional documentary. In contrast, the essay film would have the flexibility to be both politically performative and self-reflexively fragmented. As a scholar on German nonfiction cinema, Nora Alter comments on this particular trait of the film essay: “This new type of film no

longer binds the filmmaker to the rules and parameters of the traditional documentary practice, such as chronological sequencing or the depiction of external phenomena. The term *essay* is used because it signifies a composition that is in between categories and as such is transgressive, digressive, playful, contradictory, and political.” (2002: 7)

After Richter, the second major critical contribution made on the film essay was Alexandre Astruc’s 1948 manifesto “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo.” Like Richter, Astruc also describes a new kind of cinema that is equally distanced from three concurrent strains of cinema: (a) from the conventionality of classical fiction film, which Astruc compares to staged theatre, (b) from the avant-garde of Surrealism, which he does not consider to be inveterately cinematic, and (c) from the experimental tendency of Soviet montage and the silent cinema, whose static quality bears the binarism of dialectic thinking. The importance of this manifesto also resides in its address of cinema’s technological developments and unprecedented remarks on cinematic authorship: “with the development of 16mm and television, the day is not far off when everyone will possess a projector, will go to the local bookstore and hire films written on any subject, of any form, from literary criticism and novels to mathematics, history and general science.” (Astruc, 1948: 159) Although he did not directly mention the “film essay,” this manifesto was the harbinger of the essayistic cinema. Whereas Richter emphasized the visual over written words or voice-over performance, Astruc’s disposition was “camera-pen” (*camera-stylo*). He writes: “That is why I would like to call this new age of the cinema the age of caméra-stylo (camera-pen) (1948). He continues: “this metaphor has a very precise sense. By it I mean that the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing cinematically (*cinécriture*) just as flexible and subtle as written language.” (Astruc, 1948)

It is therefore possible to separate the history of film essay practice into two stages: the formative steps which took place until the end of the second world war; the second stage is the Cold War stage, when *Cahiers* critics and Left Bank Cinema filmmakers defined what is now we know as an essay film and transformed filmmaking into a form of critical spectatorship.<sup>8</sup> As Astruc states before that “direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of writing. The filmmaker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen” (Richter, 1948: 161). Cold War Stage of the essay film had its earliest and most important contributions from French directors Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, and Jean-Luc Godard.

#### 2.4 Vococentric Debate in Essay Film

First and foremost, essay film is a hybrid form that can incorporate installations, photographs, and/or motion pictures (fictional or nonfictional) and can narrate a range of subject matter. While classification of essay films by topic is certainly possible, film studies has generally separated essay films by form. I would argue that one approach to essay films is an anatomical approach, dealing with vococentric and non-vococentric predilection of the genre, whereas the other is a phenomenological approach, which I will use Timothy Corrigan’s categorization to illustrate.

The debate in regard to essay film over whether to prioritize the verbal over visual or vice versa (Eisenstein/Richter vs. Bazin/Marker) is inveterate. Eisenstein and

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<sup>8</sup> As Bordwell (2010) explains, *Cahiers* was a movie-mad people and mostly politically engaged activist, Left Bank tended to see cinema as akin to other arts, particularly literature. Some of Left Bank directors—Alan Resnais, Agnès Varda and Georges Franju—had already made unusual short documentaries, where the focus laid on experimentation on public youth’s interest. The prototypical Left Bank films were Varda’s *La Pointe courte* (1955), *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), Resnais’ *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) and Franju’s *Eyes without a Face* (1960). See Bordwell, David. & Thompson, Kristin. (2010). *Film History: An Introduction*, New York: McGill-Hill.

Richter advocated that the visual should not need the verbal to show what it wants to say. On the other hand, Bazin and Chris Marker, who were ardent proponents of voice-over, consider the verbal as a distinguishing trait of the essay film. Before drilling into more details on this issue, it would be useful to say that this discrepancy was obvious because Eisenstein and Richter were the filmmakers of the silent cinema, whereas Bazin and Marker belongs to sound era and this technological innovation not only updates or perhaps enhances the domain of the essay film, but also changed the theorization of the film practice more broadly.

Vococentrism is Chion's term for the cinematic sound track's prioritization of the human voice over sound effects and music. Essay films, as presently elaborated and theorized, are vococentric. First, they are vococentric in the sense intended by Chion: that is, film's soundtracks are dominated and distributed around the human voice-over. Second, the rhetoric of film is constructed by the logic and nature of the voiceover (Chion, 1999). We can interpret such voice-over of the essay film as being the same as the "voice-of-God" in classical documentaries. However, essay film's voice-over disclaims the responsibility of the Griersonian model, thereby shrinks the importance of authorial presence and intention.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, the essay film utters a perspective, which largely determined by the attitude and composure of a specific subject position. Cold War stage of essay film was dominated by vococentrism. However, the vococentric essay film is not what Astruc had in mind when imagining his *caméra-stylo*. Speaking of his own 1955 film *Les Mauvaises Rencontres*, Astruc admitted his embarrassment regarding "the premise of a silent film

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<sup>9</sup> Grierson's theory of documentary film was primarily an aesthetic of symbolic expression, as well as the practice of objectivity. The most significant criticism levelled at Griersonian ideology of documentary film in 1970s and 1980s, Ian Aitken (1990) underlines, was primarily the fact that his belief remained within the social consensus, which limited the reformist potential of the medium within its status quo. Another criticism can be drawn, within the framework of essayistic, is that Griersonian model is inspired by philosophical idealism, which made his documentary idea apolitical. See Grierson, John. (1998). *The Documentary Idea*, in *The Documentary Movement: An Anthology*. ed. Ian Aitken. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, and Aitken, Ian. (1990). *Film and Reform: John Grierson and Documentary Film Movement*, London: Routledge.

with commentary...because it is more of a novelistic than a cinematic construct” (Rivette and Rohmer, 1961: 4). To theorize a non-vococentric essayistic film form and its subjectivity, an understanding of the essay film with its vococentric properties debilitates the system of signification specific to cinema or visual art in general. By vococentric, I mean the voice-over. Voice-over is not the text only, the idea that is transported, but also is the mechanism by which the text makes sense. Yet, a film that does not adopt voice-over does not lack voice. Its voice is simply less explicit. This is what actually Astruc had in mind when he proposed his *caméra-stylo*, not as a derivative form of its literary precursors, but rather a mode of abstract intelligence available within specifically cinematic characteristics of the film medium.

Rascaroli states that “it is not accidental that, after Richter’s 1940 initial announcement, the two texts that signal the oncoming of the essay film (François Truffaut’s *Une Certain Tendance du Cinéma Français* (1954), and Bazin’s review of Chris Marker’s *Lettre de Sibérie/Letter from Siberia* (1958)), the first as a prediction, the second as a remark, are both French and they are linked, although separated by a ten-year interval, to the Nouvelle Vague and the establishment of the *politique des auteurs*” (Rascaroli, 2009: 29-30). As we see from “Eisenstein/Richter vs. Bazin/Marker,” that the essay film began to be dominated by the writings and theories of French intellectuals. As noted above, Astruc’s “Birth of a New Avant Garde” holds the position over the cultural delivery of the essay film, later seized by French film essayists. Astruc locates this new avant-garde between “the pure cinema of the 1920s and filmed theatre,” (which dominated Soviet montage theory as practiced by especially Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Dovzhenko) or between “a purely abstracted cinematic language and one dull and devoid of any specifically cinematic character (Astruc, 1948: 21).

I would like to shed light upon Hans Richter, a significant figure in the European modernist avantgarde. Primarily an artist, after emigrating to the United States in 1940s, he wrote film criticism and taught film history. His book *The Struggle for the Film: Towards a Socially Responsible Cinema* (1939) advocated a progressive cinema that would represent everyday life, thereby fostering increased awareness of socio-political issues. As he praised the films of the early 1920s avant-garde, including German Expressionist films, such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and *Nosferatu* (1922); American avant-garde in 1920s, which basically focused on either mythology or futuristic science-fiction (Dudley Murphy's dance films); and French Impressionism, which basically focused on naturalist drama and highly stylized science-fiction or Dadaist films (Louis Delluc's *Le Silence* (1920) and *Fièvre* (1921), René Clair's *Paris qui dort* (1923), *Entr'acte* (1924) and *Le Voyage Imaginaire* (1926)), since they "broke free in [their] own way...[from] the inhibitions imposed on the cinema by its subordination to giant organizations, material interests, distributors' tastes and political restrictions," (Richter, *The Struggle*, 1939), he also described these films as having a "lyrico-anarchistic content apparently without any socially definable content at all" (Richter, 1939). What Richter advocated was a cinema with political concerns, by making his first socio-political *Inflation* (1927).<sup>10</sup>

This film, a three minute look at what a non-vococentric essay film would look like, is important to later developments of the essay film for two reasons. Firstly, *Inflation* integrated "socio-political" dimension as an integral part of the film, which we see explicitly in the Left Bank Cinema. Secondly, Richter hailed film for its ability to "shape mental content into a more relevant and modified form.... In other words, one can no longer rely upon the simple documentary film that merely

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<sup>10</sup> Before *Inflation* (1927), Richter made "Rhythmus Series" (*Rhythmus 21* (1921), *Rhythmus 23* (1923), *Rhythmus 25* (1925)), which was basically focused on geometrical shapes and an experimentation with them. It was after *Filmstudie* (1926), yet another film with the same content but this time self-reflexive to cinematic medium itself, he changed the direction and attached the socio-political dimension to his future films, such as *Everyday* (1929) and *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947).

shoots an object to be represented” (*Der Filmessay*, 196-97). David Oscar Harvey writes on this particular film :

“*Inflation* is a silent film on the Great German Inflation of the early 1920s. Without a voice-over to serve as exposition, the film relies on images to craft its rhetoric. Yet, the images neither construct a cohesive pro-filmic real, nor do they even forge a lucid argument. Rather, it is the frenzied play of the image that weaves the film’s logic of whimsy and disarray—one that complements the scenario it depicts (the inflation) as well as the essay film’s penchant for illogic and contradiction.” (2012: 16-17)

In conclusion, Richter’s ideational cinema is linked to socio-politically responsible cinema. Although Richter stays attached to the documentary filmmaking, which is different than Astruc’s alignment with avant-garde practice, both of them admire the essay film’s ability to meditate cinematically. Eisenstein takes also this stand and I will analyze it in respect to Bazin’s stand.

As mentioned above, if “the role of the scriptwriter and that of the filmmaker must merge,” the further development of the essay film thus careens between the importance of the visual and literary aspects of the genre. A strong advocate for vococentrism was Andre Bazin. His review of Chris Marker’s *Lettre de Sibérie/Letter from Siberia* (1957) was the first to analyze an existing film by comparing it to the essay form. Bazin calls Marker’s *Lettre de Sibérie* “an essay documented by film,” hence highlighting the prominence of the written text over the images, by stating that “the important word is *essay*, understood in the same sense that it has in literature—an essay at once historical and political, written by a poet as well” (Bazin, 1958). Remarking on the unprecedented nature of Marker’s film, Bazin privileges Marker’s voice-over commentary over the images:

“The orientation of the work is expressed through the choices made by the filmmaker in the montage, with the commentary completing the organization of the sense thus conferred on the document...with Marker it works quite differently. I would say that the primary material is intelligence, that its immediate means of expression is language, and that the image only intervenes in the third position, in reference to this verbal intelligence.” (quoted in Kehr, 2003: 45)

However, there is much to drill into in regard to Bazin’s interpretation of the voice-over commentary as something other than an “off-screen” reiteration of the literary work. Bazin underlines that Marker’s novel construction of essayistic material, the distinguished superimposition of the voice-over and images, creates a new alternative to the traditional montage of Eisenstein, calling it “*horizontal montage*.” (Bazin, 1958) This style “plays with the sense of duration through the relationship of shot to shot; here, a given image doesn’t refer to the one that preceded it or the one that will follow, but rather it refers laterally, in some way, to what is said.” (1958)

Taking his notes from Marker’s aforementioned essay film, Bazin attacks Eisenstein’s concept of montage as being a binary construction, which does not allow to move away from the dominance of the images. Eisenstein’s theorization of the montage is juxtapositional, that is, the creation of meaning depends on the reciprocity of the visual shots. Eisenstein does not free the meaning from this reciprocity of visual material. For the essay film’s audio-visual construction of meaning, the authority of the representation (be it metaphorical or not) is too strong, with an inflexibility that presupposes and perpetuates a certain meaning onto a visual object. Consequently, the transcendent meaning is disembodied from the juxtaposed shots, but at the same time, does not stem from the shot itself. Bazin

was critiquing Eisenstein's "between the shots" strategy, on the grounds that meaning is held sway by the recognition of the certain embodied meaning of the individual shots. The idiosyncrasy of the essayistic approach, indeed, is to debunk such an embodiment and recognition; essayistic approach has to function "within the shot," since the first and foremost purpose of the essay film is to downgrade the totalitarian nature of the image itself. In his comments when he analyzes Marker's film, his conception of cinema that derives from the case study is "that of a cinema of the word, which cannot do without a poetic, intelligent, written text read by a voice-over" (Rascaroli, 2011: 29). I would like to draw attention to "poetic," which is aesthetic and "intelligence," which is not necessarily aesthetic entity. It is more likely to think that like Richter, Bazin sheds light on essay's nature as being between these two conditions; this between-ness actually liberates the essayist filmmaker.

While Eisenstein's montage takes into account of dialectical materialist point of view, I will, in Chapter III, argue that essayistic approach is more of Adorno's "negative dialectics," by integrating Frederic Jameson's account for the valences of the dialectical understanding.

## CHAPTER III

### ESSAY FILM AS HORIZONTAL INTERSTICE: CINEMATIC PARATAXIS AND METALEPSIS

The dialectic has long been the focus of essay film, striving to debunk the notion of History and the History of visual arts at the end of Theory, expressing it either by deconstructing the narrative and underplaying the dominant organizational patterns—a formal approach—or by producing counter-histories of images and historical narratives--what might be called an archaeological approach. Foucault's "subjugated histories" are in play for essay film form. Thus, the transgressive nature of essay film reckons a space beyond the transaction of spectator with the text" and "the transparency of realist approach, thereby enabling the preservation of the intuitive richness of filmic experience. Scholars have argued that the essay film is a hybrid form not only because it combines various forms of visual representation, such as fiction/non-fiction (Marker's time-travel/Sokurov's archives) or visual/verbal and the forms of digital media, such as installations, but also because the concepts that appear in it careen between practical considerations and a theoretical approach. Assessing the essay film means assessing the subjective mind (the particular) faced with the objective reality (the universal), and we are witnessing how these poles interact with each other and possibly with irreconcilable rapprochement. Hence, essay film is associated with the duality of rational and irrational in a

Deleuzian way, and with the epistemological duality of intellect and intuition in a Bergsonian way.

### 3.1 The Negative Dialectics of Essay Film: Chris Marker's *Letters from Siberia* (1958)

Beyond a simple formulation of the dialectic approach in essay film, which is expressed as a “negation of a negation” through montage techniques, a thematic dialectic expression of essay film suggests neither that the truth of totality be set in contrast against individual judgments, nor that it can be reduced to individual judgments (Adorno, 1984: 166). Thus, without assuming the plenipotentiary nature of subjective voice, essay film posits its perspective against the incompatibility of the immediate, individual experience and historically produced contents. The forces that breed the gap between them form the crux of the essay film. Thus, essay film’s powerful emphasis on subjectivity and self-reflexivity is needed to re-evaluate the object of historically produced content. Because subjectivity and are presumed to be incompatible, , the nature of essay film’s realism is “traumatic.” This trauma is either brought up in the thematic content, as in Alan Resnais’ *Night and Fog* (1955), which documents the atrocities behind the walls of concentration camps or as a problematic reflection of categories of the image itself, as in Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.

In the latter case, the nature of the essay film’s realism is attributed to its paralytic approach to the subject matter. The essay film’s moment of emergence begins when the moment of crisis arrives, when the space between the subject matter as it is proposed and the reaction to this proposition cracks open. That is to say, the essay film is an attempt to assay this rupture, with an immediate subjective experience against the violence of the dogma. Hence, the dimension of the “traumatic” is non-

identification, which stands for the struggle of reconciling (*Versöhnung*) the immediacy of the experience and historical *a priori*.<sup>11</sup> This non-identification implies the disguised nature of the “already-formed,” which essay film sheds light on. The film becomes an essay film, when it does not become what it shows, but profoundly on the contrary, it emerges and discloses itself with what is missing in what it shows. In other words, the essayistic is the insertion of the concept of the outside, as a critical stance against the elitism and political indifference. Becoming the other or the non-identification has its roots in montage theory of 1920s in that dialectic thinking in montage becomes “a push beyond photography’s limiting dependence on empirical reality” (Adorno, 1970). But how is essay film *negatively* dialectical? Before exemplifying this, the concept of “negative dialectics” requires unpacking, particularly in how it differs from the traditional reception of dialectics.

Firstly, “negative dialectics” is a meta-critical tool that stands against *the objectivity of contradictoriness* of canonical understanding of dialectics (Adorno, 1973:151). In other words, it gives us an alternative way to characterize the dialectical process, namely Marxist dialectics. Adorno's *negative dialectics* opens up Marxist dialectics, which had become “Hegelianised” in that it was increasingly presented as an automatic and inevitable fulfillment of a preordained path (Thompson, 2013). Negative dialectics is a search beyond the binary oppositions, turning from a definition or a search beyond the practice of such oppositions and finally to a method or structure. Two fundamental concepts that Adorno tackles in *Negative Dialectics* (1966) are the concepts of *identity* and *totality*. Fredric Jameson writes in his *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic*, that *identity* is in fact Adorno’s word for

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<sup>11</sup> One of the most practiced variances of essay film deals with the influx of the memory. Alexander Sokurov’s archival impulse in his *Tetralogy*; Marker’s time-travel in *La Jetée* (1962) and *Sans Soleil* (1983); examples of philosophical constellations. In regard to hybrid use of the cinematic mode in Sokurov and Varda — as an assemblage and the “archival” and the use of re-enactments, especially in *Francofonia* (2015) and *The Beaches of Agnes* (2008)—their de-centered cinematic representation gives a non-identity to its subject matter.

the Marxist concept of exchange relationship (Jameson, 1996: 26). Being a post-structuralist kind, Adorno's negative dialectics broaches the identitarian tradition of dialectics with the characterization of "non-identity," which disclosed the unsystematic thinking of his dialectical interpretation. Such an interpretation is associated with the familiar thematics of poststructuralism in that his introspective/reflexive and metacritical dialectic suits cases in which the connection between the individual and the system is a nebulous aura, as when Jameson proposes Adorno as a dialectical model for the 1990s (1996: 251). "Identity thinking," as Adorno refers to it, is a form of thinking which is the most expressive philosophical manifestation of power and domination. Drawing a contrast between his own form of negatively dialectical thinking and identity thinking, Adorno writes "dialectics seek to say what something is, while identity thinking says what something comes under, what it exemplifies or represents, and what, accordingly, it is not itself" (1990:149). As for totality, *Negative Dialectics* suggests that the desire for totality (Lukacs' *Totalitätsintention*) may express the idealism and imperialism of the concept, which seeks to pull everything into its own field of domination. It is this ideal or positive practice of the dialectic concept that Adorno rejects, hence tries to attribute to it a "negative" connotation. Here, Adorno's proposal of "negative dialectics" can be well illustrated and positioned beyond the Marxist dialectics through Jacques Derrida's "deconstruction." Sharing its affinity with dialectics, deconstruction undoes the very incoherence it has been denouncing and showing that it is a new incoherence and a new contradiction without yielding itself into a new ideology (Jameson, 2009: 27). Deconstruction is, hence, a paradigm of a theoretical process of undoing terminologies.

Adorno bridges his sophisticated philosophical framework in *Negative Dialectics* with another piece, "Essay as Form," which is more pertinent to the focus of this article in terms of analyzing the essay film via the Frankfurt School. Discussing the

valences of the dialectic connects to the form of the essay. By doing so, it is not to deprive essay film's montage technique from the classical montage theory, but rather through essayistic audio-visual construction, to show its insufficiency. The Adorno-Deleuze axis in front of the conventional dialectics gives us to assess the Bazin-Marker axis faced with Eisenstein's utopian function of the dialectical montage. One crucial point is that Adorno's negative dialectics is not, necessarily, against dialectical understanding in its technicality, but rather offers further assessment into the possible misreadings of the dialectic understanding in its conclusive function, as systematic. Consequently, essayistic construction is not, necessarily, *against* Eisensteinian montage, but only a new sense that it brought to the end-function of montage. In Orson Welles, then in Alan Resnais, and later on in Godard, the montage of the chain of the images breaks from the system of association, as theorized in classical montage. Deleuze judges the difference between the cinematic practices of Eisenstein and Godard in his *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, seeing Eisenstein as one form of the modernist and "totalizing" practice, but as the dialectic itself, Eisenstein's practices are too hybridized to categorize them as a complete submission to a political propaganda. Ranciere's (2006) assessment of Eisenstein's *The General Line* gives us another aspect to consider; the ideology is not in the heart of the film, and unlike Brecht, Eisenstein is never didactic (23-32).<sup>12</sup> My assessment on the nature of essayistic montage is to differentiate it in terms of

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<sup>12</sup> In his essay, Ranciere draws attention to the use of syllepsis in the film. By way of this classical rhetoric, Eisenstein utilizes double sense in the film, where the expression is taken both in its literal and figurative meanings. Eisenstein leaves the sense of certainty, with leaving the elements disjointed and the eye of the spectator uncertain of what it sees. As Ranciere underlies, Eisenstein turns our supposed modernity on its head. See, Ranciere, Jacques. (2006). *Film Fables*, Oxford: Berg Publishers.

“within-the-shot”ness.<sup>13</sup> The difference between “between the shot” montage and “within the shot” montage is that while the former tries to represent the time and perception of the shot indirectly with its commensurabilities (as how Eisenstein presented his grand synthesis, according Deleuze), the latter prioritizes the incommensurability of the shot itself and tries to preserve time directly within the shot, self-aware of the perception that is already hidden in the shot itself (as how Tarkovsky presents us *direct time-image*, according to Deleuze).<sup>14</sup> Another salient differentiating point is the question of the primacy of either subject or object. “Between the shot”ness, alongside the characteristics stated above, is the manifestation of the “primacy of the subject”. What I mean by this is that the “perception/meaning is carried into the things” (Deleuze on Vertov) and montage becomes an operation of restitution, that is, an intentional artistic activity that prioritizes subject over object. This exact prioritization was what Adorno tackled in his *Negative Dialectics*, by stating that negative dialectics foregrounds the “primacy of the object”—where “object” refers to whatever the agent is thought to constitute or generate—in front of the agent, whether individual or collective. Cinematically speaking, the “primacy of the object” is “within the shot”ness. Intellect is subdued to the power of intuition within the shot, in such a manner that subjective voice is no longer so powerful as it was before, but rather it is the weakest one amongst the duality of

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<sup>13</sup> It is plausible to theorize that the preservation of time and space within the shot itself, by way of essay film, is not compatible with Eisenstein’s later theories on the sound cinema. As the conventional example of *Aleksandr Nevsky*, Eisenstein proposes “vertical montage,” that can be associated with the “within the shot,” but rather with non-essayistic form. The concept of vertical montage is drawn from the spectator’s emotional modulations—said to be perceptible within individual measures of both Prokofiev score and within individual shot itself. However, it should be mentioned that non-synchronization is not the goal of Eisenstein’s sound cinema, in which he asserts the role of the “vertical montage” as a tool that synchronizes all human senses. His early dialectical methods in silent films is hard to evidence in his late works of 1940s. See, Goodwin, James. (1993). *Eisenstein, Cinema and History*, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

<sup>14</sup> Deleuze adopts this idea of organic unity in Eisenstein’s montage method as a quintessential aspect of the cinematic movement-image in which he divides time into two different sides—(1) “time as whole” and (2) “time as interval.” According to Deleuze, (1) “time as whole” concerns “an always open totality,” integrating all the associated images into an organic unity. (2) “Time as interval” determines “commensurable relations between series of images.” See Deleuze, Gilles. (1985). *Cinema 2: Time-Image*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.

subject-object relationship. The primacy of the object gives us a fundamental characteristic of the essay form: *the need to experiment*.

To assess the need to experiment, one must answer the important question: if essay film is explicitly subjective, then how is it possible that essay film, as being negatively dialectical, foresees “the primacy of the object”? It should be noted that “primacy” does not necessarily mean omnipotence. Rather, in this context, primacy means the point of departure for a line of thought. Although essay film is heavily subjective, it does not and cannot subjugate and construct the framework of the matter at hand (i.e., the filmic event). Along the same lines, although the filmic event—that is, the object — is prioritized in the case of the negativity of essay film’s dialectical understanding, it cannot be accepted as it is presented. In either case, both poles are paralyzed in the sense that they do not and will not reach their wholeness, for neither can substantiate or define the other fully. Neither pole of this duality is privileged by the essay film. However, the uncertainty that prevails in the object is strengthened by the filmmaker’s prioritization of style over the storytelling. The primacy of the object (the matter that has been under assay) is the primacy of the need to challenge the perception of it by the spectator. Such a challenge creates “cinematic excess” (a term first used and later developed by Kristin Thompson), in which the essay film finds its disorganization of the unified narrative structure and disruption of cinematic hypotaxis (a term I will return to, along with cinematic parataxis). In other words, the cinematic excess gives precedence to “the act of pointing” over the commonplace understanding of representation as imitation (Thompson, 1986: 140).

The second reading of “the primacy of the object” is the object’s complexity. This complexity characterizes the appreciation that the reality, the object, never utterly or completely succumbs to human thought and never altogether gives itself over to

conceptualization, thereby indicating “the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived” (Adorno, 1996: 5). Taking into account a repressive form of mimesis on the one hand and the imperfect thinking on the other, this complexity of the specific is experimented, through the speculative methods of investigation. By way of essay film, the path it takes is to experiment, which fits the content with the form, as Adorno thought that there is such a need. The attempt to achieve this fit, which Adorno believed to be impossible, deconstructs the grand narrative of cinema, which structure the material in a coordinating, rather than a subordinating style: *constellations* (as we see in Godard), *metalepsis* (as we see in Varda) and *collusion* (as we see in Farocki).

By way of the discussion on the cinematic practices of negative dialectical understanding—“*within the shot*” and “*the primacy of the object*”—I will argue that the essayistic montage is negatively dialectical. I will assess the negative dialectics of essay film and its closer relationship to deconstruction than to dialectical montage of classic cinema, by analyzing a specific scene from Marker’s *Letters from Siberia* (1958), a film made the same year in which Adorno wrote “Essay as Form.” *Letters from Siberia* makes a complex engagement with the potentialities of creating time and space between the images, and according to Timothy Corrigan, it presents an early paradigm for essay film practice in general (2011:45). The film is a report about the past and present of Siberia, an essay documented by film. The important word is ‘essay,’ understood in the same sense it has in literature—an essay at once historical and political, written by a poet as well (Bazin, 1958: 44). My intention is not to take the whole film into account and make a generalization, but rather I want to assess the particulars of the whole, since the film has been constellated into one piece. This specific fragment of the film is “the workers repairing the street” scene (the Yakutsk sequence). This sequence consists of four repetitive scenes with different voice-over: the first one is silent, without any voice-over; the

next two shows dialectical montage with impersonal enunciation; the last scene goes beyond such a binarism. The sequence in the film is repeated four times, but with different dispositions. The three parts that I will assess here are the last three repetitive scenes, due to the specific purpose of underlying the power of ideological interpretation, representation and voice-over:

*thesis* — the first *repetitive scene* that supports the socialist system

[*visuals* of bus passing by and workers flattening the road + *voice-over* in which socialist ideology prevails]

*anti-thesis* — the second *repetitive scene* that is against what is

proposed in the *thesis* [*visuals* of bus passing by and workers flattening the road + *voice-over* that purports the violence of the system]

*the third* *repetitive scene* — that does not belong to the *synthesis* of

the two preceding repetitive scenes [*visuals* of bus passing by and workers flatten the road + *voice-over* that locates itself midway between two extreme poles, by a more objective stand]

However, in the scene right after *the third*, Marker underlines that *the third* is not the solution, as *the synthesis*: The synthesis is negated with *the third*, and the third is negated by the following voice-over. What Marker tries to do here is to stop the process becoming a closed shell, and he does not allow the dialectical understanding to become a systematic thinking. It is negatively charged, rather than positively constructed.

To elaborate the possible differentiation between conventional dialectical understanding and Derrida's "deconstruction," as a multiplicity, I want to discuss, the

internal and external dialectic. The formulation of the internal dialectic of Yakutsk sequence profoundly underlines the interrelationship between the two different perceptions of the Siberian reality. The synthesis of the second and third scenes would offer such commensurability. Consequently, the synthesis eschews the problem of heterogeneous multiplicity; then the external remediation shows that internal dialectics should be theorized in broader framework. In other words, if the relationship between the two constitutive terms of the binary opposition—*the synthesis* of the scenes—breaks down into a mere external negation between two radically different items, then Marker's voice-over (disjointed from the spatio-temporality of *the synthesis*) plays a crucial role to stop *this synthesis* from becoming an "arrested" method or closed system: his voice-over breaks the deterministic nature of the opposition between *thesis* and *anti-thesis*. His voice-over penetrates into an inert multiplicity of perceptions of the scene—all different from each other but with no particular relationship. That is to say, his voice-over draws the attention not to the tension and dialectics between the different perceptions of the scene, but it rather emphasizes the profound importance of the multiple interpretations of the scene in itself.

This inertia or internal negation can be proposed as Marker uses the same spatio-temporal pro-filmic event. The dialectics draws itself within the "scene." Then, Marker's voice-over functions as "third term," the tool for the incommensurability of the "scene" itself. The concept of incommensurability holds true in regard of Yakutsk sequence, in that its construction deconstructs the flattened dialectical understanding of the montage. This "third term" —Marker's voice-over— can be taken as the mediator that permits *the synthesis*; in which case that which is neither *this* nor *that* permits the synthesis of *this and that*. The voice-over can indeed also be interpreted as "whose absolute heterogeneity resists all integration, participation and system, thus designating the place where the system does not close" (Derrida,

2001: 5). The voice-over is a transgressive part of the scene that rejects the visual synthesis to reach its systematic unity. The negation of the visual—without such a third term—would turn the negativity into a positivity. Marker’s proposition in the name of the internal dialectic is negative in the sense that the voice-over refuses any underlying identity or final *synthesis* of polar opposites. The polar opposites—as the same pro-filmic event becomes polarized with distinct angles rather than breaking the spatio-temporality—is not a “two substance” ontology, but rather only the experience of “in-itself”: as the workers repairs the street in repetition for itself, it is differentiated in itself. What Marker does is to internalize the external dialectics.

Consequently, another question arises: how does this scene give us a glimpse into the form of the essay itself, rather than being a scene of materialistic construction of dialectical montage? I want to elucidate the difference between Marker’s essayistic montage in the Yakutsk sequence and the dialectical montage of movement-image, by two possible transformations, discussed in the following section.

### 3.1.1 From *temporal* dialectics into *spatial* dialectics

The sequence under discussion calls for a reconstruction of the dialectic along spatial lines. Henri Lefebvre was first to recommend such a transformation in *The Production of Space* (1972), stating that if we consider the theory of postmodernity, the dominant feature of modern period was, profoundly, a temporal one. As one of the vestiges of such a transformation, *Letters from Siberia* even preceded Lefebvre’s recommendation, shifting the gravity of modernist temporality into a spatial one.

This transformation also proposes a cinematic transformation of narrativity; the form that represents dialectics has been shifted from that of modernist temporal narrativity (as the classical applications of the concept seen in early silent cinema) to that of spatial narrativity. It would be a misreading to interpret such a transfor-

mation by accepting the complete occupation of temporality by the spatial. It is rather, as Fredric Jameson proposes, a transformation that changes the ratio of spatio-temporal representation (Jameson, 2009: 68). This means that this transformation is a contemporary condition of postmodernity, which extends rather than breaks from the temporal categories of Hegelian and Marxist dialectical understanding.

Surely, Marker gives us a new “form of appearance” of dialectical understanding—a spatial one—visualized through the specific or intentional use of repetitive shots and voice-over. Like other sequences in the film, the Yakutsk sequence is a self-conscious, dialectical mobilization of the contrasts that intentionally eschew the resolving nature of a *synthesis*.<sup>15</sup> Yet, such a contrast is not externalized between the different perception of the scenes, but internalized within the scenes itself. The different repetitive scenes foreground spatial dialectics rather than evoking a temporal one, representing a dialectical relationship within the space of the street, which embodies complex symbolism that linked to the multiplicity of Siberian social life. Rather than searching for a fixed “truth” about Siberian social life in a given space and time, the scene demonstrates the diversity and momentum of change within the space itself.

Marker’s plausible proposition of spatial rather than temporal narrative of dialectics mediates between the historical moments and space.<sup>16</sup> The space that Marker shows us in the film (in this particular scene) is neither an *absolute space* nor an *ab-*

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<sup>15</sup> The closing lines of Marker’s commentary in the film locates the subject at hand—Siberian reality—as a land of paradox, or as a mediation of the contrasts, as he articulates “between the Middle Ages and the twenty-first century, between the earth and the moon, between humiliation and happiness.”

<sup>16</sup> My assessment of spatial dialectical narrative of the film can be more pinpointed with Bazin’s commentary on the film itself, for which he writes that the film’s innovative structure is characterized as “horizontal montage” in which meanings and associations develop less from shot to shot than via the lateral relay of voice-over to images: “from ear to the eye”. See, Catherine, Lupton. (2005). *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future*. London: Reaktion Books.

*stract space*, but the montage investigates these spatial existences. The judgment is not made by Marker in the scene or in the whole film. Absolute space (natural space) does not govern the individual's private life nor does it cast any distinction between public and private life (Lefebvre, 1991: 241). Although Marker documents Siberian reality through the space of nature, it is by no means an absolute space that exists. Rather a social space is in motion, making it not only a means of production (as Marker proposes with the *thesis*), but also a means of control, domination and power (as Marker proposes with *anti-thesis*). In this regard, abstract space has been produced by capitalism, and in such a space, alienation prevails: the source of the production (workers of Yakutsk) and the accumulation of capital. The *anti-thesis* gives us such an abstract space. Then, the spatial dialectics of the scene can be recapitulated as follows:

*thesis* — socialism's space

*anti-thesis* — abstract space

It should be mentioned that the preservation of the negativity in spatial dialectics in this specific scene that brings up the Siberian reality, as a land of contrasts, is a search for a new space that Lefebvre asks questions about: has the socialism produced a space of its own (Lefebvre, 1991: 54). This scene asks questions in line of Lefebvre's reasoning: how is the space of socialist society to be conceived? and how is it appropriated? Without any clear answer or judgment that Marker follows through the film, the *synthesis* and *the third*, by creating a negative dialectical understanding of spatial production in Siberia, rephrases the non-negligible question: what is the relationship between, on the one hand, the space that is snowed under the socialist relations of production and, on the other, the space that is held sway by the capitalist mode of production? Although the film may pose this question, it seems that Marker does not want to present a definitive answer, instead leaving the

film itself, being essayistic, to approach it repeatedly through various modes of cinematic representation.

### 3.1.2 From *interval* to *interstice*

The second point to dwell on in this scene from *Siberia* is its self-reflexive function. This is the attempt to reflect the essay form itself and on the audio-visual relationship. It should be underlined that before Marker constructs the montage sequence, he informs the spectator of the potential aspect of his interpretation by stating: “While recording these images of Yakutsk as objectively as possible, frankly I wondered whom they would satisfy. Because of course, you can describe the Soviet Union as anything but the worker’s paradise, or hell on earth” (Chris Marker voice-over, *Letters from Siberia*). This statement is followed by the shots discussed above. Two important things here self-reflexively comment on the essay film form: the concept of *interstice* and the importance of *voice-over*.

The prioritization of voice-over, but in an uncertain authorial way, is the heart of essayistic mode, which was inherited from literal essay form not just because of the bonds of consanguinity, but rather because it is a tool against the violence of mimetic dogma. Essay film’s weapon faced with a piece of visual representation—which is mostly regarded as *membra disjecta* (scattered fragments)—is the critical voice-over that exudes into the *interstice*. The subjective voice-over—metacritical indeed—suspends methodological thinking. *Letters from Siberia* attempted to preserve its stand against such thinking. In his recollections of the making of the film, Marker stated that although the organizers tried to talk him out of recording the events that they thought were not a true representation of Siberian life, Marker preserved the thought that the film is not a “pre-20th century documentary” or “like Stalin’s wife” (Chris Marker, *Commentaries*, 43). The film was made after

Nikita Khrushchev (Stalin's successor) repudiated Stalinist policies and condemned his cult of personality in "Secret Speech to the Twentieth Party Congress" in 1956, thereby commencing the process of de-Stalinization and relative liberalization of Soviet Russia. This process tried to change key institutional features that had helped Stalin to hold power, such as the cult of personality and the Gulag labor-camp system. The film's non-identitarian depiction of Siberian reality works both ways; perhaps the open-ended structure of Marker's non-judgmental narration leaves this specific space of Siberia "in-between." If taking the de-stalinization period into account, this film can be evaluated as anti-communist work, but on the other hand, the film is far from clear in this judgment. This lack of both persuasiveness and didacticism crowns this work as essayistic.

The second transformation of the so-called "Yakutsk Sequence" is the transformation from the concept of *interval* to the concept of *interstice*, in regard to the theory of essayistic montage. This scene is a methodological challenge to the pre-War formulation of montage itself. This transformation also constitutes the transformation from movement-image to time-image. As Gilles Deleuze noted, the montage of movement-image is to link one image with another in a chain, while the montage of time-image interrupts that chain of images, generating a gap in the relationship between images (*Cinema 2*) and with a seamless flow of shots at rationally measured intervals, montage can perform its associative power of generating "unity in multiplicity" (Rodowick, 1997: 51). Eisenstein's method of montage relies on the power of association. However, the power of essayistic montage is not manifested in the power of association, but rather that of dissociation—collapsing and dismantling, rather than composing. Contrasted with a "rational" interval in movement-image, *any-space-whatever* in time-image evokes an "irrational" interstice of disconnected spaces, "an untotalizable relationship" between images, in the sense that each image can no longer be measured in terms of the whole. When the whole

cannot be internalized as a cohesive unity by its parts, time is no longer considered as a chronological unfolding of space, but as “a relinking [of series] on irrational intervals” (Rodowick, 1997: 203). That is to say, Siberian reality cannot be internalized as a cohesive unity by both pro-Soviet eulogy (*thesis*) and anti-communist representation (*anti-thesis*). The transition from interval to interstice in the Yakutsk sequence presents a pure force of time directly in the multiplicity of Siberian social space. Marker’s voice-over emboldens the idea that this multiplicity is made irreducible by the fact that the *repetition* (what would typically be read as becoming-the-same) is actually becoming-the-other. The interstitial understanding of Yakutsk sequence (beyond rational interval) is that spatial dialectics (as discussed above) are beyond commensuration, because the juxtapositional relations of the images are missing, and yet Siberian reality is not bound to binary understanding. No particular relationship defines the relationship of the Yakutsk sequence, where the truth about Siberian space cannot be reduced to synthesis.

### 3.1.3. *cinematic parataxis as interstitial aesthetics*

The above assessment of the Yakutsk Sequence goes beyond a simple syllepsis, where the Yakutsk sequence would be understood differently in relation to Marker’s voice-over, to create a scene that foregrounds a specific kind of syntagma: *bracket syntagma*. Unlike parallel syntagma, bracket syntagma (Metz) is achronological, but not based on dualistic alternation (Stam, 1992: 43). It is mobilized as part of the film’s deconstructive procedures—the systematic destruction from within of the dominant cinema’s traditional narrative approach to dramatic conflict (44). The importance of Marker’s voice-over (the third term) weakens the *interpolated subjective scenes* (*thesis and anti-thesis*), in such a way that they cease to exist as parts of the dramatic conflict. Marker’s de-dramatization of Siberian reality opens up an interstitial aesthetic understanding, that I will assess through cinematic parataxis.

*Parataxis* is a literary technique that uses short and simple sentences in a coordinating manner, rather than in a subordinating style. That is to say, it is against unequal and hierarchical reasoning between sentences and narrative plots. Instead, it clusters a whole from a series of partial fragments that have the same weight and relevance to the issue at hand. Paratactically constructed text is a continually shifting constellation, neither a systematic treatise nor a collection of essays, yet it is not disjointed (Zuidervaart, 1993: 46-47). Taking Adorno's oeuvre into account, we can see that he had explicit reason for developing such a style. The style of writing in "The Essay as Form" (1958), *Why Philosophy* (1960), and *Negative Dialectics* (1966) provides us a clue for understanding the meta-critical engagement of his work in the form. It is a starting point to consider the paratactical form of essay film, for Adorno uses the essay form as a grand parataxis.

The key to the message of *Letters from Siberia* is its form, which eschews both aestheticism (in the deductive and inductive aesthetic sense)<sup>17</sup> and didacticism. The interstitial aesthetics of the film—Marker's formal innovations—cannot be reduced to his stylistic techniques. That is to say, interstitial aesthetics of the film, as politically and ethically responsible, is the aesthetic vision of a criticism of aesthetic production itself. In this sense, interstitial aesthetics has a meta-critical function. The film (*Letters from Siberia*), by way of interstitial aesthetics, does not offer itself as in possession of its content, as much as it does not construct its narrative in such a deductive or inductive sense. One way to conceptualize "interstitial" in the aesthetics of essay film is that it stands for "an intervening space" or a kind of fissure. This

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<sup>17</sup> Adorno offers a third "dialectical aesthetics" against deductive and inductive aesthetics. According to Adorno, deductive aesthetics is a "theoretical straitjacket" and has been subjugated by the historical *a priori*. Cinematically speaking, such an aesthetics in film is a conformist cinema, continuity editing and traditional documentary. On the other hand, inductive aesthetics is a complete abstraction, which is the manifestation of subjective mind, without explicit political responsibility (surrealist cinema and abstract avant-gardism). Dialectic aesthetics, Adorno asserts that, is the appropriate form to deal with and he associates such aesthetics with the essay form. See, Adorno, Theodor. (1997). *Aesthetic Theory*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

intervening space has been attributed to the fragmentary nature of the essay itself. Walter Benjamin proposes that the *mode of representation* becomes irrelevant if at the same time the problem of *representation* is not explicitly addressed (Wolin, 1994: 85). Resisting any easy consumption, interstitial aesthetics desires to fix that irrelevance, thereby achieving a fit between the form and the content of the essay film. The fragmentary nature of the essay film designates the problematic nature of representation of causal relationships. Adorno (1958) states that the only form that has done to subvert such causal representation is the essay form, which is constructed as a paratactical representation.

*Cinematic parataxis* is at the heart of *Letters from Siberia*, because it is based on epistolary—rather than poetic or novelesque--narrative. Like diaries, letters are fragmentary, personal, and open texts in progress whose effect of immediacy conveys a direct, but imperfect insight into everyday life. Besides the important function of “letters,” as the communicative structure that bounds the spectator into an active dialogue with Marker and his images, their foremost function is to construct the narrative in a paratactic dimension. The sequences that follow each other, being self-reflexively important within themselves, do not propose themselves as parts of the grand narrative. Besides the Yakutsk Sequence, other paratactic sequences in the film include the Siberian Reindeer Scene and Reindeer Commercial. Reindeer Sequence shows how reindeer in Siberia are important for the people and how they symbolize Siberian fertility. Then, Chris Marker, perhaps ironically, intercuts with the commercial uses of reindeer and channels how this symbolization is transformed or perhaps fetishized in Western culture. Two different perception of reindeer hold the sequence, each opposed to the other. Although these two sub-scenes share a common ground (reindeer), the narrative is paratactical. Marker negotiates two different distributions of the sensible with the Reindeer Sequence. On the one hand, there is a community of Arctic Siberia symbolized through *reindeer*, and as-

sociates with the community that contains the consensus; on the other hand, that community is a juxtaposition of commodities represented in a schizophrenic rupture from China to New York—the Reindeer Commercial.

Taking the whole film into account, *Letters from Siberia* emerges as a Benjaminian constellation, where specific sequences—Mammoth Sequence, Reindeer Sequence, Yakutsk Sequence—refer to the hidden arrangement but also preserve their fragmentary independence. That is to say, the paratactical form of the film preserves both the individual integrity of the particulars and their mutuality. However, my primary assessment is to consider Yakutsk Sequence’s parataxis as *metaleptic*. Metalepsis can be considered either a rhetorical figure or a narrative device; here, my primary focus is on the narrative device. When Gérard Genette extended the term *metalepsis* into a narratological concept, he did so as a means of “breaking the frame” that separates distinct ‘levels’ of a narrative, usually between an embedded one and primary story, or as a way in which an author transgresses into the narrative (Genette, 1980). An image-in-itself can be assumed to have its own narrative without the voice-over, and this is a pertinent feature of essay film in general, where extradiegetic subjective narration enters the diegesis of the documented pro-filmic event. It should be mentioned that cinematic parataxis is a metacritical technique of essay film, and parataxis is closely related to the essay form itself, as Adorno asserts and when Rancière assesses Godard’s constellation as a particular sense of montage. However, what interests me in Yakutsk Sequence is the metaleptic construction of parataxis. I would assume metaleptic parataxis as vertical, for the Yakutsk Sequence is perceived reality “within-the-shot,” (being spatially dialectical and interstitial) as discussed above. Then, in Yakutsk Sequence, there are three levels of narratives constructed vertically, and each of them enters each other’s level:

**diegetic level of images:** *the documented pro-filmic event, which Marker observes in silence*

**impersonal enunciation:** *the synthesis and the third term*

**personal enunciation:** *Marker's voice-over, maintained throughout the film.*

The reason to distinguish two separate extra-diegetic levels is that the impersonal enunciation of *the synthesis* and *the third term* is not Marker's personal enunciation. The difference could be simplified down to whether the narration presents its information as given facts or includes references to a first-person narrator. The *synthesis* and the *third term* tries to hide its marks of communication, presenting itself in an impersonal manner. Yakutsk Sequence distinguishes metacritically between those two levels of enunciation. The level of narration in *the synthesis* and *the third term* has entered into the narrative level of Marker's distanced voice-over. Here, the Yakutsk Sequence highlights in this way how the metalepsis is signified between reality and mediated reality. It seems that, for Marker, Siberia is defined as a land between the *immediate* (actual events that have been recorded) and the *hypermediated*—in which the spectator is guided through the constellations of images, animation, commercial, and manipulated voice-over.

### 3.2. Further Assessment of Essay Film Form

Essay film—a reflexive time-image—is a catalyst for the spectator that triggers the idea of “broken and plural” structure. The structure is broken in the sense that the meaning has become latent and it is plural in the sense Barthes gives us a sketch of the “text” in the paragraph called “Step by Step” (S/Z, 11-13). First step [on the plurality of the text] is to *renounce structuring the text*, according to the principles of rhetorical composition. Another step is to substitute the “representative model” with “another model” that is *decomposition* (in the cinematographic sense) of the

work, where we should “systematically use digression” (S/Z, 11-13). As *reflexive metacritique* foregrounds self-renunciation, foremost attention should be laid on the semiotic analysis of the visual representation, in which essay film exists in such a generic framework. Although semiotic analysis of essay film seems methodological and somewhat based on scientific discourse into film language, accounting for Metz’s preliminary remarks on the problematic nature of semiotics of the cinema, essay film relies on semiotics in a deliberately undisciplined way.<sup>18</sup> The digressional impulse, in semiotic level, is the manifestation of a *disenchanted* (Max Weber’s term) existence, and is constantly manipulated by an *instrumental rationality*’ (Adorno’s term). Alongside the members of the Frankfurt School, intellectuals and philosophers such as Siegfried Kracauer, Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin argued that the human condition within modernity is characterized by *alienation*, and the human condition is ensnared by the imperatives of instrumental rationality (Aitken, 2001: 15).<sup>19</sup> I will attempt to distinguish two distinct understandings of this interstice in essay film form: *horizontal interstice*, as partially dis-

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<sup>18</sup> When the semiotic discourse in film theory emerged in mid-1960, heralded by Metz’s essay “*Le cinéma: Langue ou Langage*” (1968), he concluded that cinema is not a language system, because it had no double identification. Yet, the primary contribution on film semiotics came from Umberto Eco, later, thereby stating that cinema belongs to multiple articulation. Eco managed to articulate the cinematic image into units (semes and signs) and unities (figures). After Eco’s contribution, film grasped semiotics and drew strong attention to itself. The more profound improvement was that this tripartite of C.S. Peirce’s semiotic analysis was subject to change within itself. On the one hand, in the name of uniformity, Wollen exemplifies the dominance of the tripartite with Flaherty, Renoir and Rossellini, yet Godard stands out as a prominent figure of dispersion, on the other: Godardian constellation, or unstable juxtaposition. From this point, with Wollen’s assessment of semiotic multiplicities, I would say that essayistic semiotics stands a chance to be paid attention. See, Metz, Christian. (1974). *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, New York—Oxford University and Eco, Umberto. (1974). *Articulation of Cinematic Code*, in *Movies and Methods*. Berkeley, LA: University of California Press. and Wollen, Peter. (1969). *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, London: Secker and Warburg.

<sup>19</sup> For the sake of critical thinking, a counter-argument begs to be articulated that if the *gesamtkunstwerk* of essay film is to defamiliarize the content, and hence alienate the spectator/subject to that content of the essay film, then how is it that essay film exists beyond modernistic humanistic condition, which in the first place should be denounced by it? *Gesamtkunstwerk* is, here, the amalgamation of all other art forms—photography, literature, movement-image, music and theatricality—which has been proposed by Wagner, as a “total art”. By way of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, essay film tends to achieve such a hybrid totality, where it does not prioritize any other from another, but rather employs them in an equal manner. To put the question in other words, if the essay film’s intentional hybridity is in its own right a manifestation to create a vertiginous perception—*alienation*—then how does essay form dodge the dialectics of enlightenment?

cussed in the example of *Letters from Siberia*; and *vertical interstice*, which I will connect to the idea of refraction. In another sense, this distinction is the cinematographic assessment of negative dialectics, which I put forward as “the primacy of the object”—as being fragmentary and hence problematic due to the loss of meaning and “the within the shot”ness—as being internally different. The primary reason, I should say, of such an interstitial urge is the essay’s *raison d’être*, that is the inveterate force between authorial intellect and authorial intuition.

### **3.2.1. *Horizontal Interstice* and Godardian Constellation**

Horizontal interstice links (at least intuitively) two or more existing realms; the linkage is not a cause-and-effect relationship, but rather an independent co-existence. What might be linked in this process are two or more ideas in regard to filmic space-time or two or more methodologies associated with visual representation, in which the space of such interstitial construction draws from experience, that is, immersed into diverse cultures of the material world. Due to this independent co-existence, the construction is held in the horizontal dimension of the irrational interval, because vertical construction would tend to shift to internal difference. It is not that horizontal interstice disregards the “within the shot”ness, but rather it is a prioritization of the parataxis in plot level, whereas the vertical inter-

stice would prioritize “within-the-shot”ness in fragment level.<sup>20</sup> Deleuze defines the movement-image as SAS, SAS<sub>1</sub> and ASA, where S stands for Situation, and A stands for Action. In *Cinema 1*, he contends that Hollywood genre cinema works in according to these schemes, where S (situation) and A (action) is bound to hypotactical construction. On the other hand, he does not give the structure of time-image, which takes off in the post-war period.

Godardian constellation shows a high degree of experimentation geared towards redemption: the idea that no moment of the past is lost. The idea of constellation in essay film form is why there is “no first principle, no origin and no *arche*” that thought can proceed. Godardian constellation, here, is to be understood through Walter Benjamin. The constellation consists of fragments of time and space, whose relationship with each other is not fixed to any cause and effect relationship and can be viewed as neither the representation of the whole nor as completely irrelevant to the whole itself. Thus, this method of essay film, is an attempt that resides between the success of intellectual contemplation and the failure of intuitive reasoning. The {...[S<sub>d</sub>/A<sub>f</sub>],[S<sub>d</sub>/A<sub>f</sub>]<sub>1</sub>,[S<sub>d</sub>/A<sub>f</sub>]<sub>2</sub>,[S<sub>d</sub>/A<sub>f</sub>]<sub>3</sub>...} emerges and discloses itself, as long as {[S<sub>d</sub>/A<sub>f</sub>]<sub>n</sub>} preserves their own particular importance and at the same time, their relationship with each other in a veiled manner, alongside their independent material existence. Ultimately, the cinematic constellation is a subjective mediation

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<sup>20</sup> S<sub>d</sub> stands for *dispersive situation*, whereas A<sub>f</sub> stands for *false action*. Interstice, as autonomous and irreducible, gives a direct or transcendental image of time perceived as *false action* that is no longer belong to an image. According to Deleuze, unlike the *real movement* of Hollywood genre cinema, the post-war time-image cinema (Italian Neorealism, French New Wave and German *Trümmerfilm* Cinema) is an agent of false movement (A<sub>f</sub>), in the sense that the intrinsic time is non-linear, repetitive and discontinuous. The action becomes false (A—A<sub>f</sub>), because the action does not represent the commensurable value of itself, as it is, but rather the action prioritizes the temporal immanence, over the spatial one. On the other hand, dispersive situation (S<sub>d</sub>) is one of the five characteristics of the new image of post-war cinema. Among other characteristics (*deliberately weak links, voyage form, consciousness of clichés* and *condemnation of the plot*), dispersive situation (S<sub>d</sub>) is the unintentional interaction of multiple situations, where it tends to scatter due to the weak correspondence between the levels of narration, than to contain itself. The shift of (S—S<sub>d</sub>) is charged with self-reflexive consciousness, as much as it is with political responsibility. See, Gilles, Deleuze. (1983). *Cinema 1: Movement-Image*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. Martin-Jones, David. (2011). *Deleuze and World Cinemas*, London: Continuum. and Rodowick, D.N. (2010). *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze's Film Philosophy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

as a principle of essay film that intended to penetrate the opaqueness of the past. This penetration in Godard's oeuvre is redemption of the past, whereas such style in Varda's oeuvre is as *flâneuse*. The redemption that is visualized in Godard's oeuvre is not a *positive* image of redemption, but his intention most likely is to show the degraded condition of (art) history. It is Adorno's negative dialectics, alongside Benjaminian correspondence, that is consequential in Godard's cinema, suggesting that the most appropriate philosophical approach to Godard is to fathom all things as if they would represent themselves from the eye of redemption, on the eve of such degradation.

"Ideas are to objects as constellations to stars," writes Benjamin in *Origins of German Tragic Drama* and "it's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation; in other words, image is dialectics at a standstill" in "Awakening" (*The Arcades Project*, 462). The importance of constellation, for that matter, outweighs the ordinary temporal relationship that has been a method for academic historiography. This preference is well suited to essay form, where historical fragments are juxtaposed in an assemblage that avoids the principle of construction, thus constituting what Benjamin means by "constellation". Consequently, constellation is the method that Benjamin employs to symbolically retrieve the phenomena under investigation (Wolin, 1994: 92). As Benjamin underlines in *Origins of German Tragic Drama*: "It is the function of concepts to group phenomena together and the division which is brought about within them thanks to the differentiating power of the understanding is all the more significant in that it brings about two things at a single stroke: the retrieval of the phenomena and the representation of ideas" (1977: 35).

Assessing Benjamin's writings on essay form and theories of knowledge, two specific features foreground themselves: *hypothetical description* and *anachronism*. These two features are important for both essay film form in general and Godard's oeuvre more specifically, especially *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988). Indeed, constellation is a hypothetical descriptor in an anachronistic manner. Of particular interest here is that the hypothetical description of constellation in Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* lies in the postmodern side of filmmaking, which is confronted and opposed to other forms of subjective modernist cinema.<sup>21</sup> Unlike modernist subjectivity that other time-image suggests, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* offers itself as a mechanism, which produces hypotheses through constellation itself. Hence, the hypothetical narratives of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* signal themselves as a pretext for political reflection on the paradoxical nature of different historical discourses.

To assay a little bit more into *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, the indirect references to Walter Benjamin in Godard's oeuvre should be disclosed. Godardian constellation is a *temporal-prior* horizontal interstice, where the symbolic redemption of the past—in a non-positive way—emerges in his re-treatment of the archival impulse as a way to show “the history of the present.” The first hint that Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* offers in terms of constellation and hypothetical description resides in the title of the film. Michael Witt in his *Jean-Luc Godard: Cinema Historian* (2013) mentions that the combination of the polysemic *histoire* (as “history” and “story”) and *du* in the title of the film suggests not only that the film is about the cinema, history, and all stories told by cinema, but also is about the form of history derived ma-

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<sup>21</sup> *Histoire(s) du cinéma* is four and a half hour video series, that materially incorporating archives, television, radio, drawings, paintings, photographs, cartoons, music, staged sequences and texts into one body to tell almost everything about the history and cinema, in eight parts. The parts are as follows: 1A *Toutes les histoires* (*All the stories*), 1B *Une histoire seule* (*A Solitary History*), 2A *Seul le cinéma* (*The Cinema Alone*), 2B *Fatale beauté* (*Fatal Beauty*), 3A *La monnaie de l'absolu* (*Aftermath of the Absolute*), 3B *Une vague nouvelle* (*A New Wave*), 4A *Le contrôle de l'univers* (*The control of the universe*), 4B *Les signes parmi nous* (*The Signs Amongst Us*). See Witt, Michael. (2013). *Jean-Luc Godard: Cinema Historian*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

terially from the very stuff of cinema (2). What Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* is on paper, Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema* is on film. Godard even cites Benjamin in the film, only *The Arcades Project*, but also Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations* (1969).

First of all, the common ground between Benjamin and Godard is the idea of *the return*. This return is the return of the fragment of the past in an image iterated via Orphic myth (Witt, 2013: 80). What is Orphic myth to cinematic representation? Basically, the analogy of Orphic myth in Benjamin's philosophy is that to face the past demands a surrealistic perspective, and this perspective is achieved by scavenging historical fragments so that meaning can emerge out of the montage of these obsolete elements of nineteenth century. In *Histoire(s) du cinema*, Godard employs the Orphic myth as an art historian to function as a reflection from the present to the past through the debris of stories.  $\{[S_d/A_f]_n\}$  of *Histoire(s) du cinema* is a structure of constellation, where it represents the fragments of lost history.  $\{[S_d/A_f]_n\}$  is a creative input through an archival resurrection, revamped in an anachronistic manner; the fragments of *Histoire(s) du cinema* are dispersive because Godard uses "primary" source images in a new, constellated way—derivative to its prior function—the S and A become dispersive and false, where Godard's footage does not sustain the shared conception of history or vision of the future. Those images are stripped from the communal belongings. Thus, S becomes  $S_d$  and A becomes  $A_f$ —agents of redemption. The Orphic perspective is announced at the start of 1A *Toutes les histoires (All the stories)* through Virgil's *The Aeneid*. Godard, as Orpheus himself, offers us detective characters in *Alphaville* (1965), *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero* (1991) and *Oh, Woe is Me* (1993) to reference to *remembrance and resuscitation* (72): The recurrent theme of Orphic myth is the grand parataxis in *Histoire(s) du cinema*, constructed entirely clips from other films—as  $S_d$  and  $A_f$ , yet montaged in a way that creates a temporal interstice. This temporal interstice carries the quasi-

causality of Benjaminian constellation, as redemption—which is unattainable as Adorno's *Versöhnung*, as discussed above.

### 3.2.2 Agnes Varda, Metalepsis and Reconstitution of The Subject

Agnes Varda offers a different kind of cinematic constellation. Her constellation is the *temporal-prior* interstice of levels of reality; that is, the metaleptic construction of narrative between fiction and nonfiction. As a narrative device, following Genette, metalepsis is most commonly understood as “breaking the frame” that separates distinct ‘levels’ of a narrative, allowing an author to transgress into the narrative (Genette, 2004). Yet, a salient difference Varda employs in her oeuvre is that levels of reality are directly linked to *flânerie* and the figure of the *flâneuse*, as a major theme of her films. Whether travelogues or road films, Varda underlines the specificity of “space” in relation to the body—not only a body that sees, but also a body that is seen. For this space-body relationship, I will propose *flâneuse—metalepsis* relationship. A recurring way of storytelling in Agnes Varda's films, metalepsis is a narrative style that enables different modes of narrativity to co-exist in a quasi-causal relationship. *Metalepsis*, in this sense, deconstructs beyond dialectical understanding; it is a collapse of master narratives, with detachment of identity. Metalepsis, unlike dialectical thinking, emancipates the difference beyond binary opposition and beyond negation. Hence, metalepsis is a metacritical technique, standing self-reflexively against other techniques, where we feel the thought of dispersed multiplicity. In Varda's oeuvre, most clearly, it is a collapse of master narratives of sexuality. Agnes Varda frees herself/the subject from the binary logic that negates masculinity as femininity. Indeed, it is more than a narrative style that Varda uses; rather *metalepsis* is an analysis through form. Alongside the workings of metalepsis in essay film, philosophy tends to problematize the very distinction between the *vérité* of visual representation, I propose a twofold metalepsis in Varda's oeuvre; (1)

as refraction to the essay film form, and (2) as politics of gender. However, first let me explain the concept of *flâneuse*.

*Flâneuse* is the feminine answer to the figure of the *flâneur*, a bourgeois male who wanders in space and time of modernity to observe its contradictory moments. Unlike the archetypal subject of bourgeois society, the *flâneur* does not construct or create, but rather collects the remnants of the past and the present. The *Flâneur* thus distances himself from objects in the form of commodities. He is not seeing the objects as they are, but seeing through them, as in the field he observes. In this sense, the *flâneur* is part of the crowd, but at the same time he is not the part of the crowd (Russell, 1999: 9). The *flâneur* is Benjamin's archetypal figure of the arcades. By *flâneur*, Benjamin insinuates the dismissal of the function of such a character in romantic literature. As the *flâneur* provides Benjamin with a device exploring the experiences and memories of city-space, with a methodology for his own reading of contemporary metropolitan environment (Gilloch, 2002: 213), Varda deploys the *flâneuse* to do the same, but this time for her own reading of the (feminine) self. Varda's *flâneuse(s)* include Cléo in *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), Mona Bergeron in *Sans toit ni loi/Vagabond* (1985), herself in *The Beaches of Agnes* (2008) and *The Gleaners and I* (2000), Emilie in *Documenteur* (1981), Pauline and Suzanne in *One Sings, The Other Doesn't* (1977), and Jane Birkin in *Jane B. par Agnes V.* (1988). These figures are both passionate spectators wandering the "any-space-whatevers" and also are the focus of the spectator as untimely figures of the self.

The first layer of this technique to the essay film itself, and it highlights metalepsis' correspondence between "reality" and "fiction," and between hypermediacy and immediacy. It seems that, for Varda, cinema is defined as an "artifice" between two layers of the "real": the reality of herself, the individual world of the first person author, and the reality captured — most of the times — by cinéma vérité style cin-

ematography (Pethó, 2010: 77-78). Cinematically speaking, this literary technique in Varda functions as a self-reflexive and refractive tool. Take for example, her *Daguerreotypes*, which is an emblematic film that sums up the essence of this type of metalepsis in her films. *Daguerreotypes*, analyzing the painting *Las Meninas*, a 1656 painting by Diego Velázquez considered a complex and enigmatic composition that raises questions about the nature of representation itself. Another film, *Documenteur*, made in 1981 while Varda was living in Los Angeles, is a fine example of cinematic refraction; the intentional combination of documentary style and artifice is acknowledged by the word *documenteur*, a portmanteau for French words “*documentaire*” (documentary) and “*menteur*” (liar). As the title suggests, this film combines highly personal immediate experience with hypermediated forms of representation, which in the end folds onto each other as multiple layers of “reality” and “fiction”. Of course, this predilection is a recurrent theme of Varda’s oeuvre, in such films as *The Beaches of Agnes* (2008) and *Daguerréotypes* (1976).

Varda’s oeuvre is full of such refraction, but *The Beaches of Agnes* offers a particularly effective case study for this first layer. Despite the film’s apparent devotion to chronology and its clearly marked geographical framework, as Kelley Conway writes in her book *Agnes Varda* (2015), the film’s temporal structure is loose in a quasi-causal way. As discussed above, *Gesamtkunstwerk* is the work of art that embraces all the art forms. It is the work of art that makes use of all or many art forms or strives to do so. As accepted by Richard Wagner as “revolutionary art” or “the future of art,” *Gesamtkunstwerk* is artistic synthesis. Varda’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as materialized through multifaceted use of cinematic medium—still photographs of her family past, documented slice of her present life, installation on a beach in

Belgium involving the anchoring of mirrors in the sand<sup>22</sup> and of course theatricality added to the de-centralized structure of the film, via re-enactments, where Varda stages scenes from the past as well as fantasies from the present. These fantasy sequences often halt the documentary narrative, departing momentarily from the basic chronology of Varda's life, but above all they allow her to experiment with digitally layered compositions combined with movement (Conway, 2015: 115). To say in a nutshell, *The Beaches of Agnes* is a visual anthropology to her own life.

The second layer of metalepsis attributes to the politics of gender. It would be shallow to consider Varda's metalepsis without feminist phenomenology. First and foremost, the metaleptic shape of essay film (from archival footage to re-enactment and from personal enunciation to impersonal enunciation) disrupts the hierarchy of SAS<sub>1</sub> or ASA<sub>1</sub> structures. Varda's specificity becomes unique in this reconstruction insofar as it (metalepsis) becomes a symbolic representation for "*unthinkable sex*" (Rodowick). As Varda's *flâneuse* responds to the masculine dominance of the *flâneur* in nineteenth-century France—in *Cléo from 5 to 7*, *La Pointe Courte*, *The Diary of a Pregnant Woman*, *Vagabond*, *The Gleaners and I*, and *The Beaches of Agnes*—these films also highlight two aspects of her feminist theme. The first pushes against a spatial relationship with the feminine body where the subject is masculine and the object feminine. To resist such a gender construction, one should begin to resist to the narrative structure itself, on the grounds that this positive deterministic narration foregrounds such a binary opposition in a hierarchical way. In other words, the politics of narration excludes the female subject from all diegetic levels of narration. Consequently, one can see that *the diegetic level of the film* — both the character in the film and the spectator— occupies feminist politics. On those notes,

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<sup>22</sup> Kelley Conway writes that the mirrors have both literal and conceptual functions, conjuring up Varda's memories about the mirrored armoire in her parents' room, for example, but also serving as an apt metaphor for the autobiographical story she is about to tell. Mirrors, like all autobiographies, sometimes reflect people and landscapes with reasonable fidelity, yet can also fragment and distort. See Conway. (2015). *Agnes Varda*, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

consider feminist phenomenology and searches for the feminine self outside the masculine diegetic level. Varda went on to pose the question of cinematic language in her most famous works *Cleo*, *Le Bonheur* and *Vagabond*, preserving the idea that goes beyond just a simple formal innovation—such as coalescing the fictional aspect with the documentary and installation, and so on. In this respect, her *cinécriture* involves a total visual and aural conception of the film as textual process (Flitterman-Lewis, 1990: 39). Two ways of corporeality of Varda's indexical realism that she resists the aforementioned subject gendering structures of cinema are involvement of herself to be seen in the film, but not as an object, rather a subject that see and observes (*flâneuse*) and *flâneuse* that does not only observes but also touches. As the former questions the inveterate problem of identification between the opposite sex as “from the male to female,” the latter investigates , as Varda aims to show in the figure of *glâneuse*, a gleaner who does not only observes, but also collects. In this regard, the materialist *glâneuse* is a symbolic figure for Varda's feminist cinema. At the beginning of the film, Varda reminds us that once upon a time, there were only female *glâneuses*, not male *glâneurs*, because gathering society's leftovers was considered women's labor — but this is a type of labor with which Varda proudly aligns.

The reconstituting of the subject has been perhaps at the focus of *cine écriture*, be it Agnes Varda's feminine *écriture* or Godard's cinema historian persona. The principal thrust of Varda's feminist critique is that the subject has been conceptualized as inherently masculine and, consequently, has maintained the inferior status of women. Varda's effort to open up, reform, or reconstitute the feminine subject has been a central aspect of almost every one of her films. Breaking down the Saussurian view of filmic signification in cinema, Varda's *cinécriture* attacks the Cartesian subject or “subject of modernity,” which is constituted to be inherently masculine. From this perspective, Varda's cinema shares this ethical responsibility with post-

modernism. This ethical responsibility to reconstitute the subject in Varda's cinema is a critique of the modernist subject. Varda's reconstitution of the subject with postmodern sensibility deals with two different aspects of the subject, which are distinct as the *constituted* subject (in which woman is constituted by socio-political as well as economic forces) and the *constituting* subject, in which Varda transcends the idea that woman should reject the realm of "feminine" in order to break through the constitution. Conway summarizes this duality as she discusses *The Beaches of Agnes*: "looking backwards, moving forward" (2015: 108).

On the other hand, Godard's *cinécriture* deals with reconstituting the subject, in regard to his role in the history, especially in the history of cinema. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* is a project of remembrance: remembering the past, seeing the subject of the twentieth-century cinema and what it means for the future of cinema. The film is a non-auratic work of art, where the fragments used for the project are stripped away from their contexts for a fresh way of reading the past. Certainly, this film gives multiple ways of reading: as a model of resistance, as a project of longing and praise for the past cinema history, and as a project of how the future of cinema will look like. Although the full significance is hard to reach nowadays, the film's immediate and emotional impact provokes reminiscence for cinema's memory with the idea of montage serving as his individual signature. It is perhaps one of most substantial refractive projects in which cinema has looked at itself in the mirror.

## CHAPTER IV

### ESSAY FILM AS VERTICAL INTERSTICE: INTERMEDIALITY AND REFRACTION

The previous chapter attempted to assess theories of essay film form, with constellation and metalepsis as its primary formal constructions. It touched upon the negative dialectic understanding of the essay film form in such a way that foregrounds two features of essay film form. Firstly, the essay film form resides beyond the synthesis through dialectic, allowing the opportunity to consider cinematic parataxis. As exemplified through Godardian constellation and Varda's metalepsis, cinematic parataxis is the methodology that essay film uses to construct its fragments. Thus, breaking temporal continuity, cinematic parataxis rises as horizontal interstice. On the other hand, as this chapter will discuss, a second dimension of essay film should be considered under the umbrella of negative dialectics: vertical interstice. I want to underline the slight difference of vertical interstice from horizontal interstice (which are not necessarily mutually exclusive) in case of misreadings. Rodowick defines an interstice as a temporal-prior phenomenon, with discrepancy between two possible workings of interstice touched upon by Deleuze in his *Time-Image*. Vertical interstice is *spatio-prior* working of interstitial understanding of modern cinema, which prominently foregrounds the independence of the Adornean fragment, rather than, as in horizontal interstice, the mutual and quasi-causal dependency between the fragments of different spatio-temporality. To under-

stand more clearly this difference, we can recall Frederic Jameson's assessment of the shift from the temporal dialectics of modernism to the spatial dialectics of postmodernism, but the shift does not nullify temporality entirely; however, the vertical interstice discussed in this chapter shows the same shift.

Vertical montage is Eisenstein's late conception after sound came to cinema. According to Eisenstein's vertical montage, the case rests upon the belief that the spectator is not only predisposed to grasp the narrative of the film as horizontally, from shot to shot, from sequence to sequence, but also the spectator inclined to grasp the correlations vertically, as from sensible ear to mechanical eye. Consequently, vertical montage corresponds to synesthesia, the experiential process of mixing sensory modes, such as a symbiosis of different levels of perceptions. However, Eisenstein's vertical montage comes down to "synchronization" (Bordwell, 1993: 185), as our feelings are revealed in a natural synchronization between our gestures and our tone of voice (186). As Bordwell writes that vertical montage resides in the *control* of rhythmic relations and melodic relations (186), vertical montage is out of the realm of avant-garde experimentation, no longer a technique of provocation, but rather a method by which a film achieves an organic unity parallel to that found in literature, drama, music and other visual arts (190). As Goodwin mentions, non-synchronization is no longer a goal for vertical montage (1993: 176). As a rational interval technique, essay film's vertical interstice is the answer to this vertical montage. As Adorno's negative dialectics and Benjamin's constellation emphasize, the fragments are themselves independent agents, and because the relationship between those fragments are quasi-causal in nature, vertical interstice puts forward the primacy of those fragments as "within-the-shot"ness. Vertical interstice is not only limited to synesthetic vertigo, in film's abstract space, but also affects the broader framework. The chapter will discuss two other features of the concept: (1) *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) and (2) *Refraction*.

#### 4.1 Harun Farocki and Sonic Interstice

The first layer of the vertical interstice is film's abstract space. Vertical interstice is tectonic audiovisual perception of a specific strata. Unlike horizontal interstice's temporal-priority, vertical interstice, not necessarily devoid of such temporal feature, is a *spatial-prior* phenomena, in film's abstract space level. While horizontal interstice involves the force of parataxis at the plot level, vertical interstice is the force of resonance in the stratigraphic level. In other words, whereas horizontal interstice is temporal dispersement, vertical interstice is the formulation and accumulation of temporal dispersement in the specific strata of the filmic space. Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* redefines the conception of temporality with the interstitial aesthetics of post-war cinema. The stratigraphic image is less concerned with the displacement of spatial location of time (as it is discussed in constellation and metalepsis), rather it is concerned with the elaboration of stratigraphic conception of time. The vertical interstice draws its difference with this difference of perception of time.

Tom Conley's assessment of Deleuze's *stratigraphic image* gives us a preliminary explanation for vertical interstice, with a focus on the essayistic construction of sight and sound. With stratigraphic image, Deleuze points out the nature of the new and highly tactile qualities of the image, where it becomes "archeological, stratigraphic and tectonic" [*archéologique, stratigraphique, tectonique*] (1985: 243). However, Deleuze connects these images to a literal *landscape*, discussing directors such as Roberto Rossellini, Alain Resnais, Michelangelo Antonioni, Robert Bresson, Pierre Perrault and Jean-Marie Straub. No coincidence that these filmmakers are *auteurs* who frequently employ experimental and essayistic approaches in their

films. As Tom Conley writes, Deleuze formulates a major hypothesis in his book *Foucault*: that “what is seen is never anchored in what is said” (2010: 198).

In “cracking open” Deleuze’s words along the axes of seeing and speaking, the reader quickly observes that in *stratigraphy* (and in the archive of films that are implied by this term), Deleuze suggests that there exists the presence both of *stratèges* or *strategists*—who might be the “great authors of cinema”—and of strategies, perhaps what he would call a politics of film, if not, at least as is suggested in the last pages of *The Time-Image*, even a politics of film theory. Thus the task that Deleuze confers on his reader entails that of reading theory as if it were a text to be cracked open, as a text riddled with words to be split asunder, as a crosshatched and fragmented work pocked with broken signs, replete with vocables and scattered forms that are paradoxically interwoven or visible in the abstraction of an interlace. The text would be likened to a stratigraphy, an array of words, maps, and textual fragments superimposed on one another (Conley, 2010: 198)

Moreover, Deleuze’s *stratigraphic image* goes beyond a simple landscape understanding, such as deserts in Pasolini or Antonioni, or in Rossellini’s in *Germany Year Zero* (1948) to an understanding of cinematic abstract space, where I propose that the first layer of vertical interstice takes place. In essay film, the audio-visual image acquires a new aesthetic form that puts forward deconstruction beyond “disjunction of sound and image.” Sound on the one hand and the visual image on the other not only exist vertically in disjunctive manner as two autonomous components of a single audio-visual image, but more profoundly, they represent two “heautonomous” (*héautonomes*, Deleuze’s term) elements of two different audio-visual images. Deleuze argues “heautonomous” attributes to audio-visual material in such

a way that the term accepts visual image and sound as distinct and incommensurable, yet complementary. Deleuze adapts this concept from Kant's Third Critique. As Rodowick (1997) explains on Deleuze's term in *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, sound and image follows their own compositional logic, rather than being a part of each other's compositional logic in the sense that the space of sound becomes autonomous to transform the visual space out-of-field (1997: 145). This "beautonomous" nature of essay's audio-visual material, can be observed in most essay films (such as *Letter to Jane* ( Godard, 1972), *Images of War* (Farocki, 1988), *Sans Soleil* (Marker, 1983), and I would say even in *Russian Ark* (Sokurov, 2002)) and it is what distinguishes vertical interstice from the synesthesia of vertical montage.

Harun Farocki was a radical political filmmaker. After his expulsion from the Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie in 1969 due to his political activism, he adopted "guerilla" thinking, which borrowed its inspiration from Situationism, the French New Wave and Direct Cinema (Ehmann & Eshun, 2009: 39). He began to rebuke his contemporaries in Germany, including Wim Wenders and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, on the grounds that they were conforming to the idea everybody had of what a film was supposed to be, "notably in the editing or by their habit of resorting to the canonized forms of, for instance, the shot-countershot" (40). My assessment of Farocki's essayist oeuvre deals with the relationship of sound and visual tracks, and later in the chapter I will assess Farocki under the third fold of the vertical interstice, *refraction*.

Essay film's voice-over (or *voice-off*, from the French term *voix-off*) has been described as residing in an extra-diegetic space from which it comments on visual's diegetic space. The valences of such extra-diegetic spatiality are sometimes seen as a threatening feature of this genre. Pascal Bonitzer, a film critic for *Cahiers du cinéma*, writes: "voice-off represents a power, that of disposing of the image and of what the

image reflects, from a space absolutely other with regard to that inscribed in the visuals: absolutely *other* and absolutely *indeterminate*” (1976: 33). On the other hand, sometimes the qualities of the essay make up for the demanding density proposed by the simultaneous visual, sonic and textual input, which can sometimes be exhausting and frustrating (Biemann, 2003: 9). For preliminary notes on voice-over in essay film, this extradiegetic space of voice and diegetic space of the visual correspond to each other in the interstice, the space where sound and sight are bound to each other in an “incommensurable” relationship. Dealing predominantly with voice-over and installation, Farocki’s vertical interstice emerges with two aspects: *sonic-image* interstice—that is, voice-over’s relationship to the visual (in vertical understanding)—and *installation-image* interstice.

First aspect of vertical interstice is *sonic-image*, as an archeological space, which is created in relation to the metahistorical understanding of *objet trouvé* (found object). One film stands out: *Images of the World and Inscription of War* (1988). This essay film based on Farocki’s metacritical commentary on war photographs, thematizing the dilemma of distancing from/penetration in and from the found footages or, from another point of view, the dilemma of in/visibility of an image. The problematic (or at least most discussed and criticized) aspect of the film was the voice—over. From the beginning, the film is narrated by a woman who superimposes her commentary on the montage of mostly archival images. Nora Alter (1996) questions the problematic nature of the film’s images and use of narration in terms of its representation of woman and cinematic identification (165-192). Kaja Silverman (1996) identifies another aspect of the commentator’s role, focusing on how the sonic interstice of the film (not only the voice-over but also the disjointed assemblage of Bach and Beethoven) functions as a tool to disclose the *optical unconscious* (154). The *optical unconscious* is a term coined by Walter Benjamin, who attributes this phenomenon to photography and connects it to psychoanalysis: “it is

through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis” (1931: 240-257). In 1936, in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” he uses this analogy again; he observes that “mass movements are usually discerned more clearly by a camera than by the naked eye” (1969: 251). Yet this supremacy of the mechanical eye is in the state of unconscious, which has to be cracked open, as Adorno would say in *Aesthetic Theory*, “every artwork is a picture puzzle, a puzzle to be solved” (1997: 167). Indeed, the female voice-over in *Images of the World and Inscription of War* (1988) functions to crack open the invisibility and imperceptibility of the images themselves, because the human eye does not see what it is looking for in the mechanically produced image, which unconsciously captures and hides it at the same time. Consequently, a completely different layer of extradiegetic sonic space folds onto another layer of the image’s unconscious space in *Images of the World and Inscription of War*. The sonic interstice disrupts the dogma of the conformist spectatorship in cinema in such a way that Farocki’s voice-over is not a mere complementary to the visual, but rather is an image in its own right, insofar that the text adds another dimension to the image-track, especially dimensions that are lost due to Benjaminian “optical unconscious”.

The second aspect of vertical interstice in Farocki’s oeuvre is *installation-image*. Farocki made his first installation work *Schnittstelle (Interface)* in 1996, a video essay work presented as a double channel video installation. From 1996 to 2009, he experimented on installation works nearly every year, ranging from a single channel installation to installation for 12 screens. The politics of installation for Farocki involve a break from the violence of visual image and a chance to shed light upon the dialectic of the preservation of cultural memory within the channels [screens] and its destruction between the channels [screens]. Hence, this aspect of Farocki’s vertical interstice—as *installation-image*—is based on his idea of “soft montage”: a

form of montage in which two or more (up to 12) images are *superimposed upon* each other to create “general relatedness rather than a strict opposition” (Farocki & Silverman, 1998: 142). According to Farocki, this type of montage does not establish how the multiple images should be connected in advance. Avoiding didacticism, Farocki’s “soft montage” gives the spectator freedom to create meaning. Whereas Adorno’s constellation follows the linear (and temporal-prior) logic of writing, Farocki’s soft montage *spatializes* such a constellation in the installation (Alter, 2007: 53). Moreover, Alter’s points on the soft montage are more pertinent to the spatial—priority of vertical interstice. In *Two or Three Things I Know About Harun Farocki*, Alter writes:

“If the dialectical montage of Sergei Eisenstein operates according to a binary logic that excludes any alternative not accounted for by a pervasive dualism, soft montage operates according to a logic of difference. In this regard the cut of soft montage is synonymous with the conjunction and, as multiple images are folded onto one another within the *same spatial* field, creating new configurations.” (2015: 152)

With *Schnittstelle*, his first double projection, Farocki developed a film practice which collects the fragments of cultural memories into the same visual space.

## 4.2 Intermediality and Essay Film

The second fold of vertical interstice is essay film’s impulse for *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Basically, this fold is understood as a *collaborative public space* that includes the essay film audience. Then filmmaker is a “total artist” who challenges generic boundaries in a Wagnerian search for the total-work-of-art—a *gesamtkunstwerk* in-

formed by a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, as an approach that could awaken audience awareness by estranging it from ‘hypnotic’ involvement in the illusory world of the stage (or screen, in this case) and from investment in the emotions of the characters (Brecht, 1964:193). The essayist filmmaker is also a total artist, as reformulated by Godard’s counter-cinema, where he destroys the visual pleasure of spectatorship (Wollen, 1972).<sup>23</sup>

First of all, essay film’s hybrid nature is based on the idea that different modes of representation (image, sound, text, installation, digital media, video, etc.) are harmonized together not to theorize the different dimensions of a singular reality, but rather to propose that these dimensions represent different, multiple realities. Intermediality is key in , for example, Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Varda’s *The Beaches of Agnes*, and Farocki’s *Eye/Machine* Trilogy, all of which move from *inter-textuality* to *intermediality*. In his book *Image—Music—Text*, Roland Barthes links intermediality to interdisciplinarity:

“interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins effectively... when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down—perhaps even violently, via the jolts of fashion—in the interests of a new object and a new language, neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation.” (1977: 155)

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<sup>23</sup> In his 1972 essay on Jean Luc Godard’s *Vent d’est (Weekend)* (1970), Peter Wollen coins the term *counter-cinema* to convey the emergence of new discursive style in filmmaking, which characterized by a radical animus to commercial and narrative cinema, as well as characterized by formal experimentation alongside such political stance. See, Wollen, Peter. (1972). *Counter Cinema: Vent d’est, Afterimage*, 4, 6-17.

In historical context, Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk* is the first prominent example of such an intermediality in the arts. Wagner describes this term as an alliance between different art forms, such as sonic (music), textual (poetry) and visual (opera). These alliances may be construed as politically accorded arrangements, intended to prevent the dogma and corruption of each art in alienation. Essay film, in this Wagnerian sense, tries to embolden the question of how fiction, non-fiction, music, internet, and performance negotiate content. This cross-platform negotiation takes place in more than one direction.

First direction of essay film's intermediality—as politically fused *gesamtkunstwerk* —is the problematic question of formal intermediality. According to Jens Schröter, formal intermediality involves

“formal structures (such as narrative structures) that are not specific to one medium but can be found (perhaps differently instantiated) in different media, as when the narrative realization of a film and a novel are compared. This model of intermediality uses the concept of transmedial devices, and has the problem that “media specificity” cannot be conceptualized within it.”(2012: 4)

First of all, the alignment of essay film and media specificity must be explained. Bazin's writings were influential in encouraging a different kind of filmmaking, one that favored the idiosyncrasy of cinematic medium, such as depth-of-field and point-of-view shots that defined the aesthetic of the French New Wave. Bazin argued that the space of the screen is *centrifugal*, that is, moving or tending to move away from the centre (Bazin, 1967: 105). Unlike the *centripetal* force of theater, which pulls all the action into the center stage, in the French New Wave, “man is

not the focus of the drama, but will eventually become the center of the universe” (106). The French New Wave foregrounds such a “media-specificity”. The theatre/cinema difference can be enlarged to discuss the broader paradigm of visual arts: photography, video, film, performance, museums and galleries. Yvonne Spielmann examines what Paula Willoquet-Maricondi (2008) calls Peter Greenaway’s *mega-cinema*, which reverses the centrifugal-centripetal paradigm in film and theater, and even goes beyond this by incorporating paintings, installations, museums and operas to the filmmaking practice. Spielmann rejects Bazin’s “media-specific” differentiation between a centripetal painted picture and a centrifugal picture of a film, arguing — following Deleuze — for “the untenability of an ontological difference between a centripetal frame of painting and a centrifugal film-screen” in Greenaway’s work (Schröter, 2011: 4). Willoquet-Maricondi examines Greenaway’s tendency to blur media boundaries in the film, such as *Rosa* (1994):

“As a live performance, *Rosa* was first staged in Amsterdam in 1994, and again in 1998, and was co-directed with Saskia Boddeke, Greenaway’s co-director in all subsequent operas. Like his other operas, *Rosa* is part of Greenaway’s ongoing search for a mega-cinema. To this end, it incorporates cinematic techniques on the operatic stage, making references to B-grade Western movies as well as liberal use of cinematic projections. The images are projected not on movie screens but on the stained bed sheets belonging to the main characters, Rosa and his fiancée Esmeralda, which descend upon the stage and double as screens.” (2008: 26)

Word is wedded with the image, and in broader context, this film informs the construction of spectacle. As a starting point, taking the contemporary debate on intermedia delineating the phenomena of crossing the boundaries between traditional media (painting and photography) and contemporary media (cinema, television,

video), *Rosa* opens the question of how the shift can be evaluated in the visual arts that caused by new technologies. This shift is made visible in operatic and inter-medial work of *Rosa*, where the film emerges as not a simple mixed-media work or multimedia, because the film does not only uses multiple medial images and materials, but also transforms them.

The second direction is transformational intermediality. Besides transformational intermediality, Schröter defines two more models of intermediality: *synthetic* and *ontological*. Synthetic model proposes a fusion of different media to super-media. These texts associate this process both with some of the artistic movements of the sixties—notably Happening and Fluxus—and with the frequently formulated utopian idea that the gap between art and life could be closed by way of these new, synesthetic forms (Herzogenrath, 2012: 16-31). It would be speculation to propose such synthetic purpose of essay film, if we think about installational and frame-breaking works of Godard, Greenaway, and Farocki. This model, according to Schröter, is closely related to Richard Wagner and his idea of *gesamtkunstwerk*. Yet this model also foregrounds the holistic vision of art form and utopian content. Of course, there are essay films that are synthetically intermedial, but from a historical perspective, a majority of essay films are still films, and therefore cannot be a combined *gesamtkunstwerk* consisting of different media (or arts). Moving away from idealistic approach of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, transformational intermediality is a preeminent form of intermediality in essay film. This model is functional and pertinent to the argument of the thesis, on the grounds that it is a meta-critical model and it is refractive in its content: remediation of visual arts by cinematic medium. I propose, here, the third fold of vertical interstice: *refraction as content*. The rest of the thesis deals with a specific kind of such intermediality: *refractive essay film*.

### 4.3 Refraction and Essay Film

Refraction is a specific kind of transformational intermediality and it is the force of *abîme*, rather than a force of parataxis. Unlike synthetic intermediality, which I believe is constructed through paratactic force, refraction is unmaking of visual art via the force of *abîme*. While the term relates to the concept of “self-reflexivity,” this section will explain why the concept of refraction more accurately describes the technique and content of central concern in this thesis. I introduce *refractive index* of essay film, as my guide to theorize refraction. Taxonomically and cinematically speaking, self-reflexivity and refraction belong to different categories. Cinematic self-reflexivity is a concept that deals with conscious space of itself, where the immediate is mediated instantly. In other words, self-reflexivity is the part of the representation that channelled from physical reality to hypermediated space. On the other hand, refraction deals with *refractive index*, the loss that emerges from this transformation. It is the epistemological shift that emerges through medium-specific representation. As a loose analogy with optical physics, essay film’s *refractive index* is unconscious space of itself, which actually is lost through cinematic process. Thus, refractive essay film is not only self-reflexive, but also it is characterized by the nature of retrieval: the retrieval of the lost — the *refractive index*. The transformational intermediality of essay film is to redeem this *refractive index*. As I proposed in the previous chapter, *cinematic parataxis* (as constellation and metalepsis) is the crux of essay film form; extending this concept to ideology, I propose *refractive index* as a crux of essay film’s content on an ideological level. So then, parataxis is a means to refractive index. For example, to illustrate the difference between self-reflexivity and refraction, I want to return to two sets of films that Timothy Corrigan mentions in *Essay Film: From Montaigne After Marker*. These include Robert Altman’s *The Player* (1992), and *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (Banksy, 2010). The oth-

er set of films are *F for Fake* (Welles, 1973), *Russian Ark* (Sokurov, 2002), *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (Godard, 1988-98) and Lars von Trier's *The Five Obstructions* (2003). The difference between these two sets of films is that of *refractive index*. The latter set is refractive, whereas the former set is self-reflexive, but not refractive--it can even be argued that they are hardly essay films. What is missing in the former set, in regard to essay film, is experimentation on the semiotic level.

A clear and classic example to illustrate *refractive index* would be Godard's *Letter to Jane* (1972). Since this film is a voice-over on a single image/parts of the single image, the *refractive index* is Godard's voice over because it retrieves physical reality by resurfacing what is lost in the photographic process. Another example is Farocki's *Images of The World and Inscription of War* (1988). As in *Letter to Jane*, this film deals with the epistemological shift in photographic representation. Last but not least, Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) offers us an indexical reality, as well as existential power of images. The film's narrative is constructed around the idea of a refractive index, where the physical reality bonds with photographic epistemology, yet a metacritical tool emerges and discloses itself in the film insofar that the image needs to be analyzed and find *that* refractive index that becomes the reason for all the mystery that follows in the film itself. Taking *refractive index* into account, then, refractive essay film becomes the "unmaking" of its own kind of representational, visual art forms in general.

Timothy Corrigan, extending and readapting Bazin's term *refractive* and describing it as a practice of deflection or dispersal, conceptualizes refractive essay films as films that

"concentrate the representational regime of the essayistic on the cinematic itself in order to distill and intensify the essayistic by directing it not, for

instance, at portraits of human subjectivity or the spaces of public life but at the aesthetics or, more exactly, the anti-aesthetics of representation that always hover about essay films as a filmic thinking of the world.” (2011: 191)

At the heart of many of these films—especially essay films about film—is a critical reenactment of cinematic representation itself as a way of reconceptualizing that process as an open-ended encounter with the world, as an act of criticism rather than commentary (191). Within the transformational intermediality, refractive essay film yields to art criticism, rather than a reflection or representation, insofar that the cinematic language in such films does not unveil as a mere text, but rather a cinematic language, in Foucauldian words, “enclosed upon itself” (1970: 78). Corrigan distinguishes two categories within refractive essay film: first, films that concentrate on “literature, art, or other visual art practices” through cinematic practice, such as *Van Gogh* (Alain Resnais, 1948), *F for Fake* (Welles, 1973), *Hypothesis on a Stolen Painting* (Raul Ruiz, 1979), *Exit through the Gift Shop* (Banksy, 2010), *Russian Ark* (Sokurov, 2002), *The Mystery of Picasso* (Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1958), and *Filming “Othello”* (Welles, 1978); second, films that forge a direct relationship with another film or filmmaker: *Tokyo-Ga* (Wenders, 1985), *Jacquot de Nantes* (Varda, 2001), *Close-Up* (Kiarostami, 1990), *Five Dedicated to Ozu* (Kiarostami, 2004), *Ten on 10* (Kiarostami, 2004), *One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich* (Marker, 1999) and *The Five Obstructions* (von Trier, 2003). This category can be seen as “meta-cinema”. Although such categorization is useful to winnow down the refractive essay films, I would argue a different approach which will not only define the refractive as a whole, but also will demarcate a list of refractive essayistic from refractive non-essayistic.

The first side of this methodology is to distinguish the nature of the relationship between *primary medium* (that is, cinematic medium) and *embedded medium*,

which varies from film to film. In Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, the embedded medium is film itself; in Varda's oeuvre it is the filmmaker's oeuvre, and in late Sokurov's refractive cinema it is the museum. This relationship is paratactical, and a substantial point to consider; the *primary medium* does not reflect, but rather refracts the *embedded medium*. This is how aforementioned films are refractively essayistic and those films, which do not consider such a paratactic relationship (Altman's *The Player* (1992), Berman and Pulcini's *American Splendor* (2003), Banksy's *Exit through the Gift Shop* (2010), Fax Bahr's *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (1991) are not essayistic, because the experimentation in *primary medium* is missing, leaving only conventional cinema. Hence, it subjugates critical content within its own conventional form.

The second side of this methodology is *multi-focus refraction*. Essay film, particularly refractive essay film, establishes itself as a *multi-focus refraction*, which is either *dual-focus* or more than two. *Multi-focus* refraction, involves more than a refractive relationship between *primary* and *embedded* medium --which, by itself, is a *single-focus* refraction, as in the aforementioned examples of non-essayistic films. Such a single-focus refraction is not metacritical in form (though it can be critical in the content) and is hypotactical. In contrast, *multi-focus refraction*, alongside the intermedial refraction as content, foregrounds the refraction within the *primary medium* and can extend this to the *embedded medium*. As an example of *dual-focus refraction*, Sokurov's *Russian Ark* gives intermedial refraction between primary and embedded media (first level), and the film's narrative form also refractively considers a genealogical approach to cinema in relation to theatre, photography and even painting via its single take cinematography (second level). *Dual-focus* refraction incorporates formal experimentation of the primary medium, which is missing in single-focus refraction. This second level refraction is a common ground for essay film, in general. Here, essayistic—nature depends on the relationship between *primary* and

*embedded* and which one the spectator sees as more critically engaging. It may very well be the embedded one as in the films like *The Player* (1992), *American Splendor* (2003) and *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (1991) and Charlie Kaufman's *Adaptation* (2002) and *Synecdoche, New York* (2008). That is to say, primary medium (the film itself) becomes passive for easy consumption. First two films are more Hollywood movement-image films and the third one is a conventional documentary. The last two include critical content, yet take conventional form of structural narrative.

And now there is a third level to the refraction, which takes place in *embedded medium* space. It is hard to distinguish the second level from the third level, but *The Beaches of Agnes* (2008) offers an effective illustration, where refractive criticism in primary medium space is that of form, but refractive criticism in embedded medium space is that of content. In the first level refraction, *The Beaches of Agnes* refracts through Corrigan's second category; this film is about Varda's cinema, which can be considered as a medium because its content—sexual politics, history of French New Wave, and her personal life—shines through her cinema, as medium. The second level refraction is that of the form of the film itself, which is a critical stance to the cinematic thinking itself; both with its sonic interstice and visual collage; the film ruptures and collapses the pleasure of cinematic spectatorship, formal experimentation of the visual space of the film shifts from mimetic understanding of narrative to diegetic narrative, and the sonic space of the film shifts from narrative to argumentative. She breaks the fourth wall and talks directly to the camera, and the non-synchronic narrative is also metaleptic, where she constantly disrupts the linear understanding of *durée*. Kelley Conway uses the term “modernist kaleidoscope” to refer to her representation of time (2015: 109). The relevance of the kaleidoscope is clear here: the point at which a dominant style was replaced by highly individualized style, and characterized by a tendency towards

experimentalism. Hence, the form becomes a counter—act form. The third level refraction of *The Beaches of Agnes*—that is, how the content is refractive in the *embedded* level—is both self-refractive and dependent on “medium-non-specific” refraction. Among others that give us self—reflexivity to her life history, yet by way of *refractivity* in the *embedded level*, not on the intermedial level, is the scene where:

“we see several shots of Varda navigating a boat through the canals of Sète. Still in a boat, she passes by La Pointe Courte...then we see an extract from *La Pointe Courte*, the last shot of the film, which features a boat similar to the one Varda navigates slicing through the water...the boat from behind as it moves from the foreground to the background of the shot. In the background, a train moves laterally, from left to right, transporting the squabbling couple from *La Pointe Courte* back to Paris. Next, a graphic match connects this shot with the subsequent shot: present-day Varda navigating a boat on the Seine in Paris, moving from foreground to the background of the frame.” (Conway, 2015: 114)

Moreover, the *embedded* medium is “medium-non-specific,” pointing to refractive criticism of visual representation; she becomes herself not through a mere visualization but rather through an image, fiction, performance and through the mirror. *The Beaches of Agnes* is experimentation through a triangular ménage: diversification of the visual medium in *embedded level*, deconstruction of the cinematic narrative in *primary level* and, finally, politicization of the artistic.

#### 4.4 Refraction as Content: On Photographic Epistemology

Harald Klinke writes in *Art Theory as Visual Epistemology* that a movement from art history and philosophy postulated an “iconic turn” in the 1990s, when it be-

came the “linguistic turn” in claiming a new approach to the question of how humans constitute reality, but focused on images rather than language (Klinke, 2014: 1). Of course, the question was the fundamental ontological question: “What is an image?”

Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) describes how knowledge can be acquired by empirical means; to draw the line between what humans can and cannot know is the task of epistemology and he traces back all knowledge to empirical experience, including visual experience (*Anschauung*) (2). In addition, attempting to bridge natural science with the visual field, Rudolf Arnheim, in *Visual Thinking* (1968), advocated the idea of the close integration of visual perception with the cognitive process, and in this respect he spoke of the “mental image” as a representation of “the mental grasp of an object from the physical nature of that object itself” (1968: 107).

I will assess a specific film by Jean-Luc Godard: *Letter to Jane* (1972). *Letter to Jane* (Godard & Gorin, 1972) is a 52-minute, experimental film that addresses a news photograph of Jane Fonda, who also starred in Godard’s *Tout va bien* (1972), which was taken in Vietnam on her visit to advocate peace during the Vietnam War. The image of the film primarily consists this photograph of Fonda, taken by photographer Joseph Kraft. This film also shows a linguistic turn on images, each making a substantial effort to deepen the difference between “visual image” and “mental image” through an epistemic framework. Moreover, a visual image requires the historical and cultural knowledge of its content in order to be analyzed effectively.

This film offers us two turns: one is “linguistic turn” in visual image and the other one is “epistemic turn” in visual-voyeurism. Although the image—the constant returning to the photograph of Jane Fonda— is an essential component of the film,

both Godard and Gorin prioritize sound over image, although Godard had a more personal basis for his distrust of the image. The “linguistic turn” is directly related to Godard’s personal life. He blames the problems in his relationships with two women—his first wife Anna Karina and his later wife Anne Wiazemsky—both actresses who appeared in films he directed before they were married: “both women had come to him as images — they were creations from the screen, not real women” (MacCabe, 2003: 226). Thus, voice-over or linguistic prioritization can overcome the optical unconsciousness of photographic representation. And Godard uses language, juxtaposed with a photo of a well-known female star to turn the photographic epistemology of voyeurism on its head. From a superficial point of view, the film shows Godard and Gorin looking at a photograph of Jane Fonda: two active males positioned before a passive, already-mediated female. As we see only the shoulders of the Vietnamese whom Fonda is engaging in the photo, we suppose that it is a male look in the picture that doubles when we criticize Godard and Gorin’s cinematic gaze. However, this is the epistemological presupposition of voyeurism that Godard and Gorin directly attack and destroy.

First of all, denotation in visual epistemology is the relation that holds between, for example, a word and what it applies to: words denote single objects or they denote several individuals. In the photograph of Fonda, the problem rises when it is presupposed that “Fonda denotes all women”. Here, the importance of “historical/cultural background” creeps into the frame. Godard destroys the visual image and hands us a “mental image,” when he differentiates two different Jane Fondas: one is an actress, the other a politically active “militant” engaging with the American antiwar movement in controversial ways. Without this historical information, the image can easily be misconstrued, thereby denoting the image as a passive female. However, the film’s voice-over states that it is she who is active and went to Viet-

nam, while we (including Godard and Gorin) are the passive males who sit in the studio talking about her.

Secondly, the problem is that of exemplification. Looking at the photograph on its own, there are three main characters: Fonda, a Vietnamese (probably) man with his back to the camera, and a Vietnamese revolutionary further behind the first two. Exemplification allows Goodman to consider visual representation as symbols that refer to something: by exemplifying some of its own properties, a visual image refers (at least) to these properties or to the class of things that instantiate these properties (1976: 85-95). Fonda is in focus and the two men are out of focus: one is blurred in the background and the other is outside the frame. These are the strong qualities of the photograph that can refer to male voyeurism. However, alongside those strong traits, the photograph does two more things: one is that the only gaze that exists in the photograph is Jane Fonda's; second and more importantly, the low angle of the photograph situates her gaze in a domineering position. This film concentrates on the refractive index of the photographic epistemology to physical reality. Hence, the contextual reality—Fonda's personal and public image, the war in Vietnam and USA-Vietnam relations, etc—brings crucial knowledge pertinent to the image beyond syntactic and semantic analysis.

In *Image, Music and Text*, Roland Barthes writes that a photograph is a message without a code (1977: 17). On the other hand, if we are going to consider this sentence—which stands for the idea that the photograph is a pure denotation—then it collapses any interpretation of ideology that can be connoted from its hidden elements. Then, Barthes continues, as he explains the “photographic paradox”: “co-existence of two messages, one without a code (a photographic analogue), the other with a code (the rhetoric of it)” (19). In other words, as Flusser mentions:

“the significance of the image as revealed in the process of scanning therefore represents a synthesis of two intentions: one manifested in the image and the other belonging to the observer. It follows that images are not denotative (unambiguous) complexes of symbols (like numbers, for example) but connotative (ambiguous) complexes of symbols: They provide space for interpretation.” (Flusser, 1983: 8)

When we consider the essay films of Godard and Farocki about the photographic epistemology, we see the critique of this paradox. In other words, I would use this paradox in its as a synthesis of *reflection* and *refractive index*. Reflection is the space where photographic image emerges as “without code” and it is the *analogon*. Refractive index is the space where the photograph discloses itself as a “with code,” but in unconscious way, unlike the painting, because it is mechanical reproduction.

The next and final chapter will finalize and bridge the semiological and ideological approaches. The textual focus will be Sokurov’s late refractive cinema in the light of his formal experimentation and refractive genealogical approach to the content.

## CHAPTER V

### ARCHIVAL IMPULSE AND REFRACTION IN SOKUROV'S *RUSSIAN ARK* (2002) AND *FRANCOFONIA* (2014)

The elegy is a structural principle of Sokurov's oeuvre in general. The term "elegy" conveys a sorrowful tone of contemplation, capturing two distinct perceptions of time: transcendence and permanence. Sokurov's transcendence of the elegiac oeuvre refers to loss as remembered past and its permanence as a melancholic approach in his films, where, in the present, Sokurov channels the past as permanent. The elegy in Sokurov's oeuvre becomes the elegy for art history in his earlier films that adapt Russian and world classics—Andrei Platanov, the Strugatsky Brothers and Gustave Flaubert—and his later films focus on the elegy for political history, such as Hitler, Lenin and Hirohito. This chapter focuses on the refractive aspect of Sokurov's cinema, taking the art itself as content, and it draws its example from the "museum" films, in which another tone to this elegiac theme should be drawn. This tone is eulogy for art, where Sokurov constructs as another pole in front of the elegy of political history.

First and foremost function of a museum is to retrieve and relocate certain works of art. *Russian Ark* (2002) and *Francofonia* (2014) take a pivotal moment in history and restores them (Hermitage and Louvre) like a valuable artwork. Sokurov has underlined the importance of art, including cinema, as a corridor to afterlife: "Art is the

other life” (Szaniawski, 2006: 13-27) and so the museum, sepulchre of art, becomes a peerless example of the space for his contemplation as “eulogy.” Sokurov’s refraction is a retrieval of the lost. This chapter will assess these two aforementioned films as refractive essay films and consider the self-refractive museification of the cinematic apparatus itself.

## **5.1 Sokurov and His Grand Interstice**

Sokurov’s grand interstice corresponds to his “in between” cinematic identity. On the one hand, he is a late modernist filmmaker and on the other hand, he can be considered as an early postmodern one. I want to draw a correspondence between Adorno and Sokurov, which will help to further the debate.

### **5.1.1 Sokurov-Adorno Correspondence**

Adorno’s writings are particularly pertinent to Sokurov’s oeuvre. I will put forward three aspects of such a correspondence. Firstly, Adorno emphasizes the close connection between modernity (that is, late capitalist society) and the “avant-garde”. In other words, the avant-garde is sustained by the themes, formal structures, and intellectual force of modernity. Adorno (1984) argues further that the avant-garde has loosened its chains that connect it to the ritual functions of art, and thus has been granted autonomy; in other words, art is now free to be irrelevant. Moreover, the important feature of such an autonomous art, shared by Adorno and Peter Bürger, is that it both confirms and criticizes his own surrounding within and this combination of affirmation and criticism is inextricable from its autonomy (Zuidervaart, 1991: 218). The foremost function of this duality within modern art has been its peculiarity to art, in which the needs and desires has been maintained as an aesthetic rumination or the opposite of such autonomy. In this respect,

Sokurov emerges as a simultaneously political and apolitical filmmaker. Thus, the concept of interstitial aesthetics allows us to view his oeuvre “in-between”; while the fragmentary nature of his works goes beyond traditionalism, as criticism of cinematic thinking in its formal structures, Sokurov’s political neutrality ultimately yields to his desire for pre-modern art. The director is generally considered a conservative, skeptical of the present and generally denigrating the avant-garde, yet at the same time his work endorses the postmodern subtlety.

Second aspect is Adorno’s critical sensibility that can be interpreted as a disenchantment with the culture. This negativity reveals itself both in content—as barren protagonists and environments in almost every film—through the concept of elegy and melancholy—and in formal structures, such as lack of closure and dissonance. For Adorno, dissonance is the trademark of modern art and it indicates the problematized convergence of artistic autonomy and external reality (Berman, 1982: 24). Dissonant form supplies a salient aesthetic and philosophical perspective that Adorno mentions in his *Minima Moralia*: “it is dissonance, the precise opposite of harmony...it is the basic principle of modernism” (Benjamin, 1989: 36-37). To regenerate this impossibility of harmony and maintain irreconcilability of art to reality, this irreconcilability must be consciously introduced into the work by the artist as a constructive principle, that is, as dissonance (37).

This negative tone of dissonance is a recurrent theme in Sokurov’s films that emerges in two distinct authorial practices. The first is the prevalence of shooting with “anamorphic” lenses. This could be viewed as technical triviality, yet indeed it is Sokurov’s intentional choice that helps create such a dissonance. The anamorphic lenses are used to distort the ideal of a unique and embracing pictorial center (Rodowick, 1988: 184), thereby diffracting the system of cinematic discourse. In *Days of the Eclipse* (1988), Sokurov uses widescreen anamorphic lenses “to distort

straight lines on the edge of the image, giving a slightly crooked, dreamlike quality which contributes to the film's mythical aspect...use of sepia filters, interspersed, here and there, by shots in radiant color" (Szaniawski, 2014: 66). Another film that is famous for its intentional dissonance in formal structure is Sokurov's *Save and Protect* (1989). This film, according to Szaniawski, has been hailed for its intellectual use of cinematic medium as a criticism of defunct or dormant cinematic modernism (2014: 85). Concerning his refractive essay films, these anamorphic representations—as a dissonance and distortion between physical reality and art—can be heightened further by stating that they show Sokurov's perception of a present world inhabited by untimely and ghostly bodies, as we witness in *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark* as a film's performative setting.

The second practice of such dissonance is the concept of "crowd". Introducing and describing narrative negativity in his own interpretation of political modernism in *Questions of Cinema* (1981), Stephen Heath argues that the narration of a film gains a disorienting and decentralizing potential through mobility and continuously changing views (Rodowick, 1988: 183). However, this negativity—or the centrifugal force of time-image—is indeed the qualitative feature of modernist cinema. The question is that, as Rodowick writes, "the problem of political modernism is to decide how and according to what spectatorial relations this negativity will be directed" (186). One salient feature of Sokurov's modernist sensibility is the concept of the crowd, associated with modernity itself. Crowd is the notion of negativity in modernism, and this crowd is both amorphous and a call for chaos, loss of control, breaching all restraints of political power. However, two forms of crowd should be distinguished. In his essay on Sokurov, José Alaniz discusses Jeffrey Schnapp's categorization of the two dominant overlapping iconographies of the crowd in Western visual representation in the modern period: the *emblematic* and the *oceanic* (2011: 157). The emblematic, Schnapp argues, denotes a static ideological order and it is

an impeccably ordered mass (Alaniz, 157). On the other hand, the oceanic crowd corresponds to the forces of nature, instability, and chaos and ultimately poses a threat to loose control; hence, it serves as a dispersion of power and it appears as sublime on the verge of revolution (157). Alaniz discusses two films of Sokurov, *Evening Sacrifice* (1984-87) and *Russian Ark* (2002), to assess, respectively, the emblematic and oceanic crowds. The crowd in *Evening* is contained for a larger ideological purpose when Sokurov provides us visuals of the people walking together in the same direction. Although the oceanic nature of the crowd in the film appears here and there, the uniformity of the masses comes to dominate the film, when Sokurov dissolves from long shots to another to embody the control mechanism: “the first shot shows them approaching, the second receding like rolling waves” (159). On the other hand, *Russian Ark* gives us a complete opposite nature of the crowd; in that it is impossible to control and it signifies the dispersive nature of modernity. The single take of the film exerts a control mechanism over the unruly and dispersive crowd. The film not only takes place in the museum, but also does so in a carnivalesque way; the influx of the crowd begins to show itself from the first scene of the film, where people get off the stagecoach and flow into the museum. Such a carnivalesque mood of public space continues throughout the film, with penetrations of private space from time to time. *Russian Ark* gives us two dimensions of control for such a dispersive nature of crowd. First of all, the performance and public rituals of the ball scenes emblemize the negative nature of modernist crowd. The ball scenes symbolizes the structure and order in modern societies. On the other hand, the control is also a refractive concept, which Sokurov attains with his continuous shot, and through which Sokurov tries to control the centrifugal cinematic apparatus.

Finally, the third aspect to consider is Adorno’s critique that modernism breaks with the old and valorizes the new. Tradition, in this sense, is declined in favor of

innovation. Modernism adapts a radical notion of progress to the aesthetic realm, in which, by way of anti-traditionalism, values and meanings becomes the properties of historical relativism. Adorno notes that this break from tradition is visible in both formal structures and content. This break is best considered in Sokurov's cinema as elegiac content and formal minimalism. *Russian Ark* emerges as an imperial elegy, as discussed in Szaniawski (2014), thereby initiating the rupture from the traditionalism, but of course on the other hand this "endstate" (Condee's term for *Russian Ark*'s threshold status, 2011) becomes an initiation or re-uniting. Although the film ruptures from the traditionalism and nationalism, on the question of Russianness, it goes back to itself with a complete obliteration of the Soviet Period. The film evokes both imperial elegy and eulogy for European high culture. However, the latter dominates the former, because of the choice of the museum for such a representation, which also correlates to such a break off from the traditionalism and nationalism. Consequently, for the "fragmentation" argument of Sokurov's modernist sensibility, the debate over whether a unique "Russianness" can be established, should be drawn and this debate has intensified Russia's sensitivity to the West after the dissolution of Soviet Union. *Russian Ark* (Sokurov/Custine) and *Francofonia* (Sokurov/Napoleon) position themselves against such a "uniqueness," by acknowledging otherness and challenging self-adequate identification.

To analyze *Russian Ark* as an expression beyond nostalgia for imperial nationalism, the choice of Hermitage and the pivotal historical omissions in the film are crucial. First of all, Sokurov's choice of Saint Petersburg—established by Peter the Great as a European city—over Moscow and the choice of the Hermitage over the Russian Museum—which holds an impressive collection focused on Russian art—locates the film beyond a nationalistic approach. Moreover, other museums—such as Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and St. Basil's Cathedral—would have been more evident signifiers of Russianness. On the other hand, the film's narrative omits some

important historical achievements of imperial Russia: the achievements of Peter the Great (e.g. his victory over Charles II in the Great Northern War and his establishment of St. Petersburg) and Alexander I, who defeated Napoleon. In their place, Sokurov presents Nicholas I, the most despotic tsar of the nineteenth century. The ending of the film—which takes place right before the Soviet Revolution in 1917—pointedly excludes Soviet Russia, but this is not sufficient to validate *Russian Ark* as imperial nostalgia. The ending is ambiguous enough that, if it is read from a temporal perspective, then the advent of the Soviets clearly states a “movement,” through which, inevitably, at some point tradition will be broken. However, on the other hand, if it is read from the perspective of perennialism, “the arc that sails on” can point to a “stasis,” which corresponds to Sokurov’s transcendental romantic view of art. *Francofonia* offers some clarification on the master plot of *Russian Ark* inasmuch as the earlier film can be seen as a prologue to *Francofonia*. In *Francofonia*, Sokurov departs from a focus on Russianness and proposes a broader “Eulogy for Art,” although the names of both films appear to frame an explicitly nationalistic context.

In its formal structure, Sokurov’s break-off tradition becomes anti-aestheticization of cinematic image in his earlier documentary features and later on, in his refractive films *Russian Ark* and *Francofonia*, cinematic minimalism. He breaks off from the attraction-image and his images becomes an abjection, an ouroboros consuming its own self-grounded beauty and reason. “I am disappointed with montage as such. The physical senses provoked nowadays by montage seem very primary, primal, and frankly, it irritates me,” he tells in his interview (Sokurov, 2006). His vision of cinematic text is different from Eisenstein’s. For Sokurov, a manipulation of shots in a specific order to great a greater and perhaps intended meaning leaves no room for private contemplation, and *Russian Ark* epitomizes the rejection of this tradition of Soviet montage theory, never breaking the temporality of filmic space and

constructing the story vertically by voice-over. Choosing Hermitage to represent the body of imperial heritage enacts and encourages private contemplation on the social memory of Russian culture, which Soviet montage was against.

### 5.1.2 Sokurov and His Postmodern Attitude

Adornean reading of modernism in Sokurov's recurrent themes are avant-garde sublation as distanciation, negative tonality as elegy and melancholic nostalgia in content and cinematic minimalism, abjection-image rather than attraction-image in formal structures. However, it is difficult to locate Sokurov within a specific artistic movement or cinematic disposition. Many critics commented on Sokurov's cinema as a peculiar blend of experimental and traditional approaches to filmmaking.

Mikhail Iampolski argued that Sokurov's cinema coalesces experimental avant-garde aesthetics with a conservative ethical position based on moral values of nineteenth century (1990: 309). As a late modernist, what *Russian Ark* and *Francofonia* both evoke is his sense of respect for high art and perhaps most profoundly preserves the assumption that enlightenment can be utilized and hence, utopian drive of restoration--which was at the heart of *Russian Ark* and *Francofonia*--is a valuable guide in making the everyday life. This utopian drive of restoration in late Sokurov's refractive cinema perhaps makes him closer to postmodern sensibility in that the persistence of traditionalism in Sokurov suggests the crisis in modernism is due to the failure to transmit the past into the present. In this sense his postmodern sensibility is an attempt to retrieve traditionalism, or in Lyotard's words, is "putting forward the unrepresentable [i.e. the utopian drive of Sokurov] in presentation itself...the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable" (1984: 81). Hence, his grand interstice lies in the mixed sensibility of modernist style and postmodernist perspective. This grand interstice (unlike a paradoxical stance) is that his perception is that of archaist

and conservative, at the same time being an experimenter or rather, I would say, as an *arrière-garde*. Alexander Kluge mentions:

“after literature has developed and tested all the possibilities to express human experiences, after music has had such a huge, rich development...there is no avant-garde when avant-garde has done everything...If we have to lead something, we lead it both the avant-garde and the *arrière-garde* [rearguard]. The avant-garde is a concept valid for the early bourgeois period, but not for the end of the bourgeoisie. At this time it may be necessary to be behind and to bring everything forward” (Kluge & Liebman, 1988: 58).

Here, there is a difference between two perspectives, which I believe breeds Sokurov's grand interstice: as a late modernist and as a postmodern filmmaker. This is the difference between “dominating” the material and seeing it as “preservation,” which also reflects the difference between the modernist concept of the avant-garde and the postmodernist concept of the *arrière-garde*. Regardless of how much avant-garde predilection of Sokurov puts him in the line of modern filmmakers, that is experimentation of the medium and deriving a new meanings through dominating the material as Fredric Jameson has demonstrated (2006), he is essentially a postmodern filmmaker along the lines of Lyotardian definitions of the current. In general, postmodern thinking, according to critics such as Deleuze and Jameson, is marked in the second half of the last century, an epistemological shift that has a lot to do with World War II. However, as others argue (after Lyotard), postmodern thinking should not be considered as a periodization that comes after modernism. Postmodernism, for Lyotard, is not a break with modernist understanding, but rather it is a part of modernism itself. Moreover, in the same respect, modernism does not succeed the premodern. It would be more useful to consider postmodernism as an attitude within modern thought,, the way the subject thinks. I can

propose three different correspondences of postmodern attitude in Sokurov's cinema with more or less will give a clear picture of his grand interstice.

The Lyotardian aspect of Sokurov's postmodernism is the "essayistic" approach in the films' formal structures and the concept of "future anterior" in the content. The essay form, according to Lyotard, is postmodern (1984: 81). Lyotard defines the postmodern as "incredulity towards meta-narratives," where meta-narratives (or grand narratives) are understood as totalizing stories about history and the goals of the human race that legitimize knowledge and cultural practice. Of course, I will accept Sokurov's cinematic practice as profoundly essayistic, even his fictional films. Lyotard's theory of the end of metanarratives develops a version of the consensus among theorists of the postmodern, preeminently Derrida and Deleuze, who see postmodernity as an age of fragmentation and pluralism (*rhizome* in Deleuze and *différance* in Derrida). Lyotard's *petits récits* (little narratives) are understood as a non-finite series of heterogeneous events of narration, which resists incorporation into grand or meta-narratives by virtue of being discontinuous and fragmentary (Readings, 1991: xxxiii). Essay form is an example of this non-totalizing saturation. By way of Lyotard, the essay form becomes skeptic and sublime at the same time, in that the essay form mixes the pain and pleasure which accompanies any attempt to present the unrepresentable. The unrepresentable is not something metaphysical in this context, but rather it is essay film's formal argumentation that without fragmentation, the narrative cannot present what it wants to represent in a totalizing manner within its ethical dimension. Moreover, the essay form involves paralogical experimentation, where the essay moves beyond and against the established way of reasoning. The paralogical experimentation in Sokurov lies in his method of blurring the boundaries of reality and fiction, with documentary style (found-footage and photographs) and performance/staged scenes. Mostly, these two

poles of paralogical conjunction are embedded within the film's narrative in *Francofonia*.

The second aspect of Lyotard-Sokurov correspondence is the concept of "future anterior" (*post modo*). According to Lyotard, the postmodern attitude should be understood in the framework of the paradoxical notion of "future anterior," meaning that at some point any cultural or political field will reach a crisis point and will need to renew its own method. At such points of crisis, only the principles and discoveries of the past are explicit and known. To put it another way, postmodern art will become a knowledge of "the past".

## 5.2 Eulogy for Art and Elegy For History

Positive paradigms claim an indirect relationship between an individual's experience and historically a priori, thereby validating the autonomous existence of historicity outside the realm of personal experience. Sokurov tries to debunk such reasoning with his radical cinematic form, resisting this indirectness that is incompatible with the essay form. His films (especially *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark*) explicitly correct a historically produced object by his own personal experience. His voice transcends the personal (*temporal—ephemeral*) to reach the public domain (*timeless—eternal*). In *Russian Ark* and *Francofonia*, Sokurov carries his personal depiction of life/history into the impersonal state of metaphysical mind, which stays "in between," in such an ontological way. The narratives of Sokurov function as a dialogic and dialectic reasoning of historical phenomena. I will examine three themes of "in-betweenness" in *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark*; namely that of *history/tradition*, that of *being/identity*, and that of *art/politics*.

*Dialectics of history* in Sokurov is Lukacsian. Frederic Jameson underlines Lukacsian thought of history in that there are two distinct paths to imagine it: in one, which Lukacs calls historical drama, we witness historical figures in person on stage, which shows their importance and power; in the other, which Lukacs calls the historical novel, we witness such personages by the mediation of an average character who is given the opportunity to glimpse into their lives from afar (Jameson, 2006: 3-4). *Russian Ark* and *Francofonia* synthesize these two paths. No doubt the artistic frameworks of *Russian Ark* and *Francofonia* converge with that of drama to a certain degree— particularly inasmuch as they also answer historical drama’s secret fascination with the pivotal scenes of history (Hitler, Napoleon, Peter the Great, Catherine the Great and Nicholas II) and satisfy its longing to see with the spectator’s eyes, to detect with the ears what they said and did in private behind those ‘closed doors’ (Sokurov utilizes this ‘closed doors’ in *Francofonia* very often) the historical drama undertakes to disclose for the spectator. *Russian Ark* juxtaposes great characters’ private surroundings and their emotions against their symbolic status. When we see Catherine The Great suffocating as she says “I want to pee” and Nicholas II pleading to his wife to forgive their daughter for being late for the breakfast, we witness the dispersion of the official chronicles of history books and the spectator’s experience of private, even banal historical moments. In this respect, Sokurov’s “ahistorical” re-enactments deconstruct the memory and historicity of Russian Empire. In *Francofonia*, when we see Hitler’s domineering scenes from the archives, which took place after German infiltration to Paris in the year of 1940, our eyes witness the “heroic expression of his decision and his will and the anxieties of his power and his mission” (Jameson, 2006: 4). On the other hand, Sokurov glimpses into the private lives of Metternich and Jaujard behind closed doors with his historical re-enactments. He engages in a “disturbing” dialogue with Napoleon, both in *historically novelistic* and *historically dramatic* (Lukácsian) way. Sokurov’s depiction of these public figures is the co-existing identity of private and public.

Yet, perhaps the distinct space Sokurov constructs—which is neither private nor public, but rather a chronotopic—opens up a room for Sokurov to indulge in “real” communication with the past. Another crucial point to consider in constructing the narratives of *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark* is the struggle of Time and Space. Unlike the Hegelian thought of inevitable death of one for the sake of the other, Sokurov builds a diachronic formula of a synchronic historical period. By constructing incomplete historical moments in a consecutive way in *Russian Ark* and pondering a specific year in the life of the Louvre, Sokurov seems to present us a Jamesonian or post-structuralist formula; that is, to avoid the confusion of diachronic with time and history, and not to imagine the synchronic with the static present (Jameson, 2003: 98). This will lead us to the inveterate antinomy of tradition and liberty. It is crucial to point out that Sokurov’s redemptive aesthetic in *Russian Ark* and especially in *Francofonia* is to liberate and establish the autonomy of art. Yet, on the other hand, Sokurov presents us such an antimony as an interdependence phenomenon, by introspection with retrospection.

The liminality of being/identity has two facets. The first facet is the dichotomy of self/other. More precisely, I mean Sokurov’s depiction of Russianness in relation to the West. Of course, the issue of Russian identity does not emerge from the post-Soviet era, rather, needless to say, it begins in the nineteenth century. The debate over whether a unique “Russianness” can be established has intensified Russia’s sensitivity to the West after the dissolution of Soviet Union. *Russian Ark* (Sokurov/Custine) and *Francofonia* (Sokurov/Napoleon) position themselves against such a “uniqueness” by acknowledging otherness and challenging self-adequate identification. Sokurov’s multiple temporality tries to bridge the nineteenth century and post-soviet contemporaneity. The second facet of the dialectics of *being—identity* is the dichotomy of everyday life/the past (transient/prolonged). The importance of

this facet is its immediacy. Sokurov constructs explicitly but skeptically an immediate interaction/interpretation of glorious archives. *Russian Ark*'s narrative is filled with *intercuts* of the past and the present. While we see the paintings of Hermitage—the *rhizomatic* depiction of European cultural history—Sokurov interrupts constantly reshapes the Russian identity. The transcendence and immediacy of interaction in *Francofonia* is twofold. While we see Sokurov intercuts between his own contemplation on the Louvre and the sequence of Captain Dirk, the contemplation—in a confessional way—opens up a second room with direct dialogue between Sokurov and Napoleon/Metternich/Jaujard. Sokurov juxtaposes and interrelates two different temporalities of “travelogue”; that of Captain Dirk's ship and the ship which was bringing all those paintings to Louvre. It is the ironic interdependence of personal life and historical moment.

The third theme is the interstice between *art* and *politics*. For the first scope to consider the part of art is within the form of representation. Sokurov's contemplation within cinematic form is the synthesis between “movement” and “stillness”. The aesthetics of “long shot,” “less cut” and the restriction of camera movement comes with a deceleration of the film images. Being against the concept of montage—which disrupts time and space to create impression—Sokurov employs a different cinematic rhythm, by drawing the spectator's attention to the liminal variability of the images and movements. His creation of narrative is more vertically proposed, rather than horizontally as *montage* and *decoupage* put forward. The technique of montage, as theorized by Eisenstein and criticized by Bazin, is juxtapositional in that the creation of meaning depends on the reciprocity of shots. In other words, it is a juxtaposition of disparate elements, disrupted in time and space. Therefore, montage takes the individual shots as they are and creates exterior meaning by the consecutive shots. The problem with montage, as Bazin underlines, is its binarism, or the presupposition of an individual shot not functioning without other (preced-

ing or succeeding) shots. On the other hand, Bazin's *decoupage* is disembodied from such a binarism, stating that the meaning is 'within the shot'. Yet, *decoupage* is based on juxtaposing of the shots to construct a less disjointed space and time. Therefore, the common trait that montage and *decoupage* share is the privilege given to visual. That is not to say that the verbal content is insignificant, rather it functions as an auxiliary to the visual. The idiosyncrasy of essayistic approach to not only visual but also to verbal content, as the form of essay, is to downgrade the totalitarian nature of the image itself; to subject the meaning 'within the shot' to the verbal commentary. I would call this technique as *étage*. The difference between *montage* and *étage* is that by the reduction of "cut" and "movement," Sokurov opens up a space that can be filled with the perception, reflection, and imagination of the spectator. In other words, unlike the visual immersion of formalistic and realistic narrative, Sokurovian immersion is juxtaposed with the order of the thought. As I propose, *étage* does not necessarily eschew the concept of montage, but rather, unlike montage, does not disrupt the temporal and the spatial existence of movement. This means that *étage* (de)constructs the narrative within the same temporal-spatial existence, aiming to protect the feeling of time with *decoupage*—which by the use of depth of field and contrast "within the shot" (as opposed to the concept of montage). Yet, unlike *decoupage*, *étage* does not manipulate the narrative by the visual but rather by the voice-over.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, there is still a difference. *Decoupage*, like montage, functions as "continuity editing". On the other hand, *étage* deconstructs and accumulates the story vertically. Thus, *étage* is essayistic approach to film language, rather than formalistic (*mon-*

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<sup>24</sup> Silent films continually break up the action, motivating cutaways, permitting easy transition to dream sequences and helping the script to fall into acts and scenes, whereas sound cinema prefers the unbroken continuity of the story across the image track. *Découpage* is a product of filmmakers deciding in advance how to parse the continuity of a fiction for its dramatic effectiveness and spatio-temporal design. For further details, see Barnard, Timothy. (2014). *Découpage*, Montreal: Caboose.

*tage*) and realistic (*découpage*). For this approach to be plausible, there should be an essayistic synthesis of image and verbal communication, not in such a manner that the verbal content will support the visual, but rather in such a way that the verbal commentary will disclose the concealed nature of the image. Sokurov's films require this *étage* approach, since his visual aesthetics go against Eisensteinian technique. *Russian Ark* is an epitome for *étage*; without breaking the temporality of filmic space and constructing the story vertically by voice-over. Choosing Hermitage to represent the body of imperial heritage enacts and encourages private contemplation on the social memory of Russian culture, which Soviet montage wave was against.

How do we see such an *étage* in *Francofonie*? Although *Francofonie* uses various montage techniques when constructing the narrative—cutaways to archival footage of political figures and the fictional performance of private space or the dialectic construction of French and Soviet approach to art—the film still protects its verticality, which prioritizes the order of the thought initiated by Sokurov over the order of the image. The order of visual narration is trivial in regard to the order of contemplation, and Sokurov's images, indeed, yield to his voice. The importance of his voice layers the images. Thus, the cinematic medium in *Francofonie* has the purpose of not narrative, but contemplative immersion.

Finally, I propose the antinomy as the co-existence of *historical materialism* (i.e. the empiricist approach) and *transcendentalism* (i.e. the autonomy of art) in *Russian Ark* and *Francofonie*. As a politically neutral or indifferent body, both *Russian Ark* and *Francofonie* bifurcate art and politics, idealizing the former. In these films, Sokurov also delves into an immediate discussion of philosophical concepts of empiricism and idealization of his subject-matter. Sokurov's *transcendentalism* is skeptical towards reasoning and sensation alone. Moreover, he positions the historical

phenomenon usually presented as “still image,” “paintings” and “archival footage,” in relation to cultural revival; such a *topicalization* (Benjamin) of the past goes beyond a mere act of historical materialism. Sokurov excavates what has been “hidden from history”. *Russian Ark* and *Francofonia* rework the archive and contemporize it. These films echo “after” history and “after” the end of art—Sokurov symbolizes this “after-ness” with the absence of the particular spatial and temporal whereabouts of his gaze and voice. Once it echoes from the “after history and the end of art,” Sokurov attempts to “bring back the eternal” in a Nietzschean way.<sup>25</sup> It is captivating how Sokurov visualizes this “cycle of returning/occurrence” in *Francofonia*. The film begins with split screen—one screen shows the credits, as it is ending already, on the other black screen, as Sokurov receives calls from other people. This black screen—the beginning of the film is the end of the film:

*Sokurov (receives internet call from Captain Dirk)*: Hi, Dirk! I was waiting when you make contact with me. But I don't see you. There is no picture.

*Captain Dirk*: Let's talk without a picture. Where are you now?

*Sokurov*: I am at home, I have just returned from Europe.

*Captain Dirk*: What would we do without Europe! Have you finished your film?

*Sokurov*: Yes, my friend! The work is almost done, but I think the film is not going to work well.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This idea of ‘having it over again... throughout all eternity’ is the idea of the ‘eternal return’ of the world and everything that happens. In his unpublished notebooks, Nietzsche toyed with the idea that the world actually does repeat itself, that everything that has happened in the past will happen again, that everything that happens in the future has happened in a previous cycle.

<sup>26</sup> The translation of Sokurov's lines from Russian is mine.

It is in this “timeless” relation between the past, the present, and the future that Sokurov attains his transcendental romanticism.

I will propose that his construction of contemporaneous *aura*—the historical presence situated between modernity and postmodernity—is *museification* in *Russian Ark* and *Francofonia*. Sokurov’s *aura* is trans-temporal, nostalgic and haunting, in which Sokurov guides us in the mode of *introspection* (critical voice-over as self-examination) by *retrospection* (visiting the past).

### 5.2.1 *Aura* in *Russian Ark* (2002) and *Francofonia* (2014)

*Russian Ark* and *Francofonia* explore the relationship between image and reality, between film and document, between visual record and historical event. Sokurov’s “museum” films ask questions about “*the cinema as repository of memory*” (Rascaroli, 2009), where cinema itself is an archive and, ultimately, a “museum.”

Historically, an ‘aura’—an appearance of supernatural force arising from an object’s authenticity—includes an experience of distance between the reader and the work of art. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin writes that aura is “a strange wave of space and time: the unique appearance of semblance or distance, no matter how close the object may be” (250). He gives a unique but negative feature to “aura”: its unapproachability, despite a possible spatial proximity. The proximity, of course, should be understood in a figurative way. Later, Benjamin would proclaim the destruction of such a distance by the reproduction of the image by cinema/photography. *Russian Ark* and *Francofonia* seek to preserve the aura, somehow, by proposing a specific use of the cinematic medium: camera’s distanced gaze, dislocated voice-over and (non)proximity of re-enacted performances. Sokurov does not see the camera as an instrument of mechanical repro-

duction—that is, as an instrument which records quasi-physical imprints of material reality—but rather uses it with the perceptual perspective of the subject as a point of reference (Hänsgen, 2011: 67). Although Benjamin noted a loss of autonomy and idealism in art, replaced with its service to politics, Sokurov’s standpoint is just the opposite. One of the reasons for such a “*sacralized*” achievement for the art itself in the films, is the choice of the concept of museum —unlike photography and cinema, a museum preserves the distance between the reader and the text/paintings/sculpture/installations for the “aura”.

The temporality of Sokurov’s *aura* is a non-linear, vertically accumulated concept, and his trans-temporal construction of the narrative emerges as “*hauntological*” confluence. Hauntology, as being a portmanteau of haunting and ontology, is a historical and temporal disjuncture (*out of joint*) where the presence is neither dead nor alive, neither absent nor present (Derrida, 1994). We are not sure of the exact temporality of *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark* narratives. This means it is ambiguous whether Sokurov himself visits the past—which will take place in the past—or Sokurov has been visited by the past—which will take place in the present. In terms of historical temporality, the visit itself is an important nuance not to be overlooked. In either case, the narratives introduce us a “haunted” temporality with its *intrusive ghost* performances—sometimes ignorant to the gaze, sometimes fleeing out of sight and sometimes dissolved between “present visitors”—or Sokurov’s gaze becomes out of joint, preserving the mystical condition of the film itself. Yet, in the general framework of *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark*, Sokurov channels the disconnect between fact and experience, between materialism and idealism, between immediacy and virtuality. This cleavage can be seen as a bridge. The cinematography of *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark* emphasizes “fragmentary temporality”—the Jamesonian “perpetual present” seen in the mixing of old and new for an effect of

futurity. Sokurov not only employs nostalgic affection but also foreshadows the future of what he seeks—timeless and universal *nostos* for Art.<sup>27</sup>

“From the outset,” Jameson writes in *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*: “a whole battery of aesthetic signs begins to distance the officially contemporary image from us in time: the art deco scripting of the credits, for example, serves at once to program the spectator to the appropriate ‘nostalgia’ mode of reception” (Jameson, 1991: 20). The nostalgia in *Russian Ark* suggests that “imperial longing” is inadequate; together with *Francofonia*, this nostalgic aura is shown to extend beyond Russianness. This is, therefore, not a nationalistic nostalgia, but rather a nostalgia for the status of art. These films aim to weaken the credibility of both historicism, which assumes that historical prediction is attainable by discovering the ‘rhythms’ or the ‘patterns’, the ‘laws’ or the ‘trends’ that underlie the evolution of history; and of historicity, which claims the actuality, authenticity, and factuality of historical moments.

### 5.2.2 Museification and Memory in *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark*

*Francofonia* relates to “Frenchness” as much as *Russian Ark* relates to “Russianness”. The choice of Hermitage and Louvre in the ark of Russian and French cultural history serves as an instrument beyond the locality of the filmic narrative. These films demonstrate two aspects of instrumentality: *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* instrumentality of museification. Museification, extrinsically, is predicated on some assumptions, such as the recognition of some ‘value’ in objects inherited from the past (which is something that we share also with societies of previous times), the perception of a

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<sup>27</sup> The etymology of the word “nostalgia” comes from “nostos”—home, and “algia”—longing. The cultural critic Svetlana Boym distinguishes two distinct connotations of the word: first, with *nostos* as the focus, the predilection to restore and revive a home; whereas the second connotation the longing. See, Boym, Svetlana. (2001). *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books.

break with the past, and the moral obligation to transmit what we have inherited from the past to future generations. Moreover, the museum is in charge of setting up the mental space wherein the objects will be seen as mattering, as worthy of appreciation; hopefully, the excellence of the object will reward this initial act of faith by which the observer agrees to approach an object with respectful attention (Didier 2006, 179). Alongside those assumptions that Sokurov ultimately emphasizes as an ending notes for the films, he also questions the memory of history and cultural heritage. On the other hand, intrinsically, this museification is related to the art itself, especially cinematic medium and its representation.

‘Eulogy’ (for Art) and ‘Elegy’ (for History) in *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark* as narrative after the end of art and after the end of history are made visible by two features: the choice of paintings in *Russian Ark*—as *ruination* and the style of narrative in *Francofonia*—as *pastiche*. It seems that the Sokurov’s archival impulse and nostalgic/elegiac/eulogic disposition in the films foreshadow the end of art and history. The archival impulse, as nostalgic retrogression, is heterogeneous and incomplete; this incompleteness, which is not necessarily pejorative, is completed/extended by his re-enactments. This artistic retrogression foreshadows Sokurov’s temporality at “the end of art”. On the other hand, in terms of history, this archival impulse presages the failure of the futuristic vision. Probably, the powerful validation for “the end of art/history” and “Sokurov’s Dasein—as death” argument of the films’ temporal narrative would be the use of museum and the concept of museification. The museification of Sokurov’s *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark* are not presented as exaltation of the historical representation, but rather indicate its elegiac and apocalyptic nature. Didier Maleuvre writes in his *Museum Memories: History, Technology and Art* that “museification occurred with the advent of metaphysics, in the act of declaring art’s mode of making truth improper. One day art became a mere copy of truth, and no longer its effectuation, the first museum was founded” (Maleuvre, 1999: 43).

As Didier's interpretations follow, unlike the work of art—which is unprecedented in such a way that it is different from other forms of human production—the museum is a technological production and it falls under the authority of tradition and political affiliation (Maleuvre, 1999).

The primary aspect of Sokurov's *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark*—both of which posit questions of identity, history, and memory— is to divulge the damage done to culture and art by museification, as Heidegger and Nietzsche have claimed before. For Sartre, the museum is the historicity of death and there is a historicity of life of which the museum provides no more than a fallen image (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 63). Although there is cinematographic beauty in *Russian Ark*, Sokurov retrospectively considers the past as apocalyptic, with its ruination and the destiny of its art captured in the paintings of the film, whose gravity belongs to Hubert Robert and the Hermitage.<sup>28</sup> Sokurov utilizes the integral characteristic of the historical time as the incessant piling up of “ruins upon ruins”. The paintings shown in the film—such as *Landscape with Ruins* (1772), *Ruins on the Terrace in Marly Park* (1780) and *Ancient Ruins Used as Public Baths* (1798)—create a space where art exists “after the cataclysm, after the end of the history and art.” (Maleuvre, 1999: 86)

The theme of ruination is more explicitly represented in *Francofonia*, where Sokurov narrates the struggle of two figures (Metternich and Jaujard) to preserve the Louvre in the face of political pressure. The Nazi occupation leaves the Louvre a vulnerable target. In the end of the film, as he “visits” them in private and foreshadows the future, Sokurov ruminates on the historical events in Soviet Union and discusses the possible ramifications of the “political service of the art” and how it can become “catastrophic” for the sake of artistic autonomy. Sokurov visits Hu-

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<sup>28</sup> Sokurov made a short film about Hubert Robert—*Robert: A Fortunate Life*— in 1996. The theme of ruination is used in this film as primary focus.

bert Robert and his ruins in *Francofonia*, but this time with an ironic voice-over commentary: “Of course, it was just a fantasy”. Yet, the sole credit of historical ruination is not attributed to the events that came after the ending of the film. Dragan Kujundzic relates such “ruination and catastrophe” to history itself. In his “After ‘After’: The Arkive Fever of Alexander Sokurov,” he concludes that *Russian Ark* turns the catastrophic past into a source of post-historic melancholia that seeks redemption from history (Kujundzic, 2004: 234). Bound to “eternity” after the end of history and art, the endings of the films present us the back to the desired future; *Russian Ark* returns back and repeats itself; when the camera approaches the exit of Hermitage—Sokurov reiterates that “we are destined to sail forever and live forever”. By the same token, *Francofonia* relives the year 1940 of the Louvre as melancholia by iterating “*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*” (Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood) throughout the film as an elegy for history. Sokurov’s desire for classicism and for the remembrance of the things past is carved into a line that he repeats in both films: “Какие души” (*What souls!*). Sokurov plunges into reverie and recalls Chekhov, when he sees Dirk’s ship wobbling in the ocean. He tries to speak with Chekhov, but Chekhov sleeps and the door closes in front of the beholder. Marianne—the traditional personification of France—occupies the space between Sokurov’s private room and the past, occupies the time between the present and the past. Louvre and Hermitage, as the symbols for the *nostos* of lost moments and memory, become a corridor between an incomplete past and Sokurov’s desired future.

This desire effect that comes from the factuality of the “ruination,” transcends “the failure of futuristic vision” as a principle of (dis)connection to the status of the messianic redemption. Sokurov’s redemptive criticism—the task of the intellectual—becomes the task of salvation; “rescuing the few unique visions of transcendence that grace the continuum of history from the fate of oblivion which incessantly threatens to consume them” (Wolin, 1994: 48). In other words, Sokurov’s

depiction of historical time chronologically on the road of progression, yet the task of such a depiction is to make it to be felt in the present and such an attempt is only comprehensible in its metaphysical structure, like the messianic realm or the idea of the French Revolution.

Undoubtedly, memory is one of the main features of Sokurov's oeuvre; the act of remembrance emerges as a nostalgia in an elegiac and a eulogized mode. *Russian Ark*, the film as completely flashbacks in the memorial realm of Sokurov's subjectivity as a dream and *Francofonia*, the film as Sokurov's daydreaming, haunts the present time. Memory and use of pre-revolutionary photographs—Anton Chekhov (dead, but Sokurov prefers to use “sleep”) and Leo Tolstoy (the film begins with him) in *Francofonia*, disclose Sokurov's “present time” as “dead time”, because this expresses the implausibility of happiness in the present if the past is silent and cannot help us. Therefore, the films eliminate importance of present time over the dead time of the past. Sokurov, himself, conveys the idea that the memory of the dead is as important as the living body and deserves the same chance of being respected. He turns to Tolstoy and Chekhov, but they freeze in silence.

Sokurov, as himself in the films, does not live in the present, or else the temporality he conquers in the space is undefined. In *Francofonia*, Sokurov's own space (his work office) is bereft of any temporal sensitivity. Consequently, this paves the way to a sacrifice of his own time and space for the memory of the past and the desire for the future. So, he lives in the past and at the same time reaches to the future, without embodying the present. Jeremi Szaniawski argues the dialectic between two diacritical concept of nostalgia; the memory and the history of nostalgia, where one is substitutable for the other as a world of imagination for an impossible space (Szaniawski, 2013: 179). For Szaniawski, the most crucial impulse for making *Russian Ark* was the celebration of a past Sokurov never experienced and Sokurov

saw the Ark as a ship of memory. I will propose that such a construction of memory is “prosthetic” in *Russian Ark* and *Francofonia*. Alison Landsberg defines the “*prosthetic memory*” of the films’ visual body as the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past. Landsberg writes that prosthetic memory, “theorizes the production and dissemination of memories that have no direct connection to a person’s lived past and yet are essential to the production and articulation of subjectivity” (2004: 178). Such a production of subjectivity is untimely; when Metternich and Jaujard vanish into eternity, the film ends, yet it begins again.

Besides the relationship between museum—memory, when we look at it as intrinsically instrumental, Sokurov’s museification is a meditation on art itself. It seems Sokurov does not portray the historical moments in *Russian Ark* with the utmost accuracy and to make a causal relationship between art and politics in *Francofonia*, he uses the performances of the films as an allegorical symbol for the quiddity of the museum itself—thus, for the relationship between museum-cinema. The intrinsic instrumentality of museification of *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark* has two connotations. Firstly, as a form, Sokurov’s movement becomes a silent image, enriched and re-disciplined by a highly subjective voice-over. The “within the shot”ness works as a point of reference for the critical propensity of his cinema. This connotation, of course, is cinematic nostalgia, taking the medium of movement (film) back into photography/painting, by using the museum as a retrospective travel in a freezing—machine.

Secondly, Sokurov establishes the concept of museum in tandem with those of *work of art* and *archives* in order to debilitate the hierarchy and authority of the documents over the art. While Sokurov finds his way into a light with paintings in *Francofonia*, this hope is always interrupted by the historical moments—such as intrusion of Napoleon, Hitler’s invasion of Paris and fragments from the Soviet

Union. However, Sokurov uses “archives” for inspiration and contemplation over the universal understanding of the status of art. Sokurov’s *Ark* synthesizes both classical conception of vision and modern model of vision. In a common standpoint, *Francofonia* and *Russian Ark* would fight over the preservation of such a “classicism.” While *Russian Ark* is praised for its cinematographically realistic long take, *Francofonia* is more like a postmodern “pastiche”—casting very different forms of visuality, coalescing non-fictional archives with fictional performances (which are still presented in an archive-like manner), and extending archival impulse in tandem with internet as immediate visual experience. Unlike *Russian Ark*, *Francofonia*’s narrative progresses intermedially. Building up the reality of the contemporary existence of visual experience, the film is ultimately a redemption of history, which implies the transformation and reinterpretation of the tension between loss and desire. I use this instrumentation—both intrinsically and extrinsically—to return to Sokurov’s master plot in *Russian Ark* and *Francofonia*: the relation of “thinking and being,” or that of “spirit and nature” and “experience/history and memory”.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

This thesis wishes to stay in the optimistic side of Rodowick's paradoxical stance. As he articulates in his *The Crisis of Political Modernism* (1988), on the one hand the film and film studies is disappearing into media and cultural studies with the increasing dominance of digital technologies and one would imagine that film as a mechanical and celluloid medium has been evaporated. On the other hand, Rodowick hopes that political modernism still survives. Of course, essay film has evolved from pure avant-gardist propagandism (I am thinking about Vertov and Eisenstein here) to more metacritically engaged political modernism (1960s and 1970s), and then to more postmodernist attitude, which emerged in the crisis of such a political modernism (the phase which has sacrificed the small screen for something else). Hence, essay film emerges and discloses itself insofar that it gives up the claims to both objectivity of classical cinema and subjectivity of modern cinema. In this sense, although essay film has been established as a highly subjective genre, this subjectivity is with negative connotation which imposes an incredulity to modernist subjective will. This is how essay film has been theorized, yet this demarcation is risky and not fully deserved. Although the present analysis adopts some postmodernist attitudes towards essay form, but yet this time within the small screen, this thesis intentionally proposes to preserve the importance and the discourse of the essayistic filmmaking. The title of the thesis is not only attributes to

the content of the films that I discuss, but also my intention of this preservation as such.

Refraction is self-reflexive concept, in that for example, if a piece of literary writing is refractive, this means that its content is directed into itself. For example, Gyorgy Lukacs' "A Theory of Novel" is a refractive piece of work. Or any literary work on literature itself. A film is refractive when film's content is directed towards visual representation and its process and agents. For example, Altman's *The Player* is a refractive film, which is about the agent of the filmmaking process. Or any "making-of" films, such *The Heart of Darkness* is about Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now*.

The Second World War was the event that changed everything. And of course, the following incidences — such as de-Stalinization and the collapse of charismatic personality in history—required a new way of thinking. It can be argued, then, that the 50s and 60s probably marked the end of Art, History and Theory and Meta-narrative. From this point on, everything has become refractive, questioning the nature and function of its own domain. Philosophy took its refractive turn.

Theodor Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, one of the main examples of this philosophical turn, criticizes such thinking in the sense that it always presupposes the subject-object duality in a hierarchical manner. Which basically means, the concepts and theories that have been produced by subjective agent is always set out to consume all the meanings that an object contains. *Negative Dialectics* was an attempt to claim the insufficiency of subjective agent in front of the object — the object means here any cultural, artistic or political occurrence. Roland Barthes' *The Death of Author*— which basically was to criticize the relationship between the meaning of the text and the creator of the text—was literary refraction. The book was to attempt to extract the meaning of the text through interpretation as a method of reading and

criticism, that resided beyond author's identity—his political views, the historical context, religion, ethnicity or personal attributes.

In regard to essay film, the essayistic should re-think the avant-garde filmmaking of 1920, not from politically responsible aspects (because essayistic cinema is as such), but rather from ethical dimensions. For Burger, the avant-garde movement was indeed a paradoxical situation, where it emerged against the institutionalization of art—such as Dadaism, and Surrealism. However, the possibility of institutional criticism in the name of avant-garde created the idea of the inescapability of “institution of art.” For Burger, this paradox was at the heart of modernist avant-gardism. What essay film offers us is the fact that the end of art should be declared in the sense that it is the only way to break completely from such institutional chain. For this reason, essay film should be personal and stay personal. This break from avant-gardism places essay film in the period of post-history and post-art, advancing three different goals: (a) to collapse the uniformity of narrative form through plurality of styles (pastiche, intermediality), (b) to collapse the violence of dogma by figuring the essayist filmmaker as manipulator of signs rather than producer of an art object, (c) to collapse the distance between the filmmaker and the audience by modeling the viewer as an active decoder of messages rather than a passive consumer.

Although the thesis has discussed subject/object relations in the discourse of political modernism as it is argued in Chapter II with the concept of negativity (after Adorno), the particular use of the term “dialectic” has remained rather questionable. The discourse of Marxism on the one hand (Farocki and Kluge) and the discourse of Deconstruction on the other hand (Godard and Varda), the semio-ideological formulation of essayistic filmmaking, in the eve of crisis of political modernism, is an attempt to assimilate the two sides. As the negation of the normative codes, the essayistic mode of filmmaking (personally I prefer Varda's term *cinécrit-*

*ure*) is narrowed down to the theme “refraction as retrieval” in the thesis. This framework is preserved with the idea that if essayistic discloses itself in the name of such a retrieval, then at utmost importance, essay film then should retrieve itself in the first place. What I mean by this is that the literalization comes within itself in essay film practice, because otherwise it would not be peculiar to its medium, if we could engage such a critical practice with writing or music or by other means of representation. Essay film becomes then essayistic and more importantly “a film,” because of this literalization of the visual retrieval. The films that are discussed in the thesis, to most and full extent, stays true to such a visual redemption.

Chapter II gives us a historical context of essayistic tendency in visual medium, beginning from Vertov’s deconstructive practices in late 20s to post-war period of highly subjective voice-over narrative essay films. In general, this chapter tries to define, as it has been defined before, the essay form. Deriving from the writings of Adorno, Lukacs, Montaigne, and Bakhtin, essay form has been defined as subjective, heretic, transgressive, self-reflexive and reflective, skeptic, relativist, non-conclusive, and non-didactic form. From literary genre to film, of course some traits are preserved and extend beyond literary predecessors, because it is a different medium. However, the impulse behind the form still appears in the filmic medium itself. Alongside the formal descriptions mentioned above, I propose a somewhat more general trait: the “traumatic” nature of essay film. This characteristic of essay (film) form has two implications. First of all, it infers to the nature of essay form itself and the process it casts upon itself. Yet this trauma is not problematic in that the exploration emerges from skepticism toward the already formed. Essay’s methodology is “traumatic” because it wants to bridge the unreconcilable: the subjective will and the objective meta-narratives. Secondly, “traumatic” corresponds to the modern fragment that comprises essay film’s content. In this sense, it is problematic because post-war epistemology and phenomenology tries to reveal the in-

consistencies in this modern meta-narratives and divulge the discontinuities that hold it in the cover of false unity.

Chapter III tries to assess the formal structure of essay film. This chapter introduces *cinematic parataxis* as a primary formal structure of essay film. This formal structure is assessed through Adorno's "negative dialectics" and foregrounds its two important aspects: as "the primary of the object" and "within-the-shot"ness. As a preliminary assessment of cinematic parataxis, I discuss Marker's *Letters from Siberia* (1958) in the line of Adorno's negative dialectics. This assessment entails three important features of the film: (1) the shift from temporal dialectics to spatial dialectics, (2) from interval understanding of the filmic montage to interstitial understanding of it, and (3) paratactical construction of the film. The further assessment on the importance of cinematic parataxis is discussed in Godardian constellation (in relation to Benjamin) and Varda's metaleptic narration. In general, this chapter, then, corresponds to horizontal interstice of the essay film.

Chapter IV deals with the vertical interstice of essay film. As being different approach of interstitial understanding of essay film form, vertical interstice, I propose, prioritizes the fragmental construction rather than narrative construction. I propose three different possible reflections of such a verticality. First reflection is sonic interstice and I draw examples from Harun Farocki's films to substantiate this first reflection. Sonic interstice mainly deals with the interstitial construction of audiovisual material in the filmic abstract space. Vertical interstice, in this respect, finds another solution to essay film besides Eisenstein's Hegelian one. There is of course a relation in the first fold of vertical interstice, but this is neither an external correspondence nor an interval relation; it is beyond synesthesia in that the non-visual space of essay film (including voice-over) represents a completely different diegetic space, whereas the visual space corresponds to another layer of this verticality. The

second reflection that I discuss of this vertical interstice is the essayistic impulse for the total-work-of-art (as *Gesamtkunstwerk*). *Gesamtkunstwerk* of essay film is different from Wagnerian concept and from Eisenstein's vertical montage, in that such impulse in essay film is not a totalizing attempt. This attempt of essay film is the attempt for intermediality. Yet, two different intermedialities can be differentiated: the first transforms essay film into the realm of mega-cinema, where the audio-visual representation ceases to exist in the small screen and becomes a synthetic intermedial work, as defined one of the four models of intermediality by Jens Schröter. Although this model strongly predicates the future importance and development of essay film, it is not the primary object of the thesis; however, I briefly engage with it to show the directorial tendencies in Peter Greenaway, Godard and Farocki. The primary focus I lay on is the another model of intermediality, and that is transformational intermediality. This model is pertinent in that I try to preserve the essay film theory within the small screen. Refraction, as essay film's transformational intermediality, is the third aspect that I elaborate on the vertical interstice. This chapter concludes with refractive engagement of vertical interstice in Godard's *Letter to Jane* as photographic epistemology.

The last chapter is the content analysis of Sokurov's late refractive cinema. This chapter takes a refractive genealogical approach, as defined in the beginning of the thesis. This chapter tried to assess two aspects—eulogy and elegy—in *Russian Ark* (2002) and *Francofonia* (2014) under the refractive essay film. Another important point the chapter makes is, self-refractively, museification of cinematic apparatus itself.

Two different understandings of formal experimentation in essay films conceptualize the intellectual construction and intuitional perspective of these films. Whereas parataxis is filmmaker's intuitional perspective, such a construction does not ex-

plicitly emerge as a judgment on content, but rather suggests quasi-causal connections. Vertical interstice figures the essayist as a philosopher who drills into the object with a critical voice. What vertical interstice (or in other words the force of abyme) is to individual stars, horizontal interstice is to their constellation—that is, how fragments finally relate to and compose the whole.

The impulse to distinguish between two interstitial concepts of essay film brought the vertical interstice into the foreground for its archeological rather than constructive point of view (the latter trait is then attributed to the horizontal interstice). By no means mutually exclusive, I attribute the horizontal interstice to filmmaker's creativity, such as artistic intuition and sensibility, while the vertical interstice draws on the filmmaker's role as a critic. In most cases, film essays demand both sides, with the horizontal interstice emerging out of the vertical interstice. A demonstrated vertical interstice without creativity would not be enough for a filmmaker to become an artist.

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